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## ABSTRACT

This document consists of the three 1998 issues of The Bernard van Leer Foundations' "Early Childhood Matters." This periodical, addressed to practitioners in the field of early childhood development, evolved from an in-house publication directed to projects funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. Articles in the February 1998 edition include: (1) "Effectiveness: The State of the Art" (Evans); (2) "Alternative Perspectives on ECD: Communities at the Forefront" (Wood); (3) "Spain: Playing My Part" (Paz); (4) "Standing Up for Fairness: Activism with Young Children" (Derman-Sparks); (5) "Developing a Culturally Appropriate Curriculum" (Mitchell); (6) "Mexico: Educational Experience with Women and Girl Children in Rural, Indigenous Communities" (Garcia); and (7) "Venezuela: Developing Inter-Sectorial Networks" (Yanez). The June 1998 issue includes the following: (1) "Culturally Appropriate Approaches in ECD" (Smale); (2) "Trinidad and Tobago: Violent Parenting Violent Children" (Pantin); (3) "Young Children in Complex Emergencies: Field Notes" (Felsman); (4) "Guatemala: Working with the Mayan-Ixil People" (Tzay); (5) "A Culturally Oriented Approach for Early Childhood Development" (Bram); (6) "Building on an African Worldview" (Callaghan); (7) "The Basis of Human Brilliance" (Adamson); and (8) "A Turkish Father in the Netherlands" (Cetin). The October 1998 issue focuses on culturally relevant approaches in early childhood development. The articles are: (1) "Culturally or Contextually Appropriate?" (Smale); (2) "Cultural or Context: What Makes Approaches Appropriate?" (Hurenkamp); (3) "Samenspel: Playing/Taking Action Together" (Copier and Hurenkamp); (4) "Sesame Street: Kids for Peace Project"; (5) "Zimbabwe: The New Community Publishing" (Bond-Stewart); and (6) "Motivating in Challenging Contexts" (Brock). Each issue contains information on foundation publications and announcements related to foundation activities. (KB)

# Good Matter

the bulletin of the Bernard van Leer Foundation

FEBRUARY 1998

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES  
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*Effectiveness: the state of the art*

*Alternative perspectives on ECD*

*Spain: playing my part*

*Standing up for fairness*

*Developing a culturally appropriate curriculum*

*Mexico: educational experiences with  
women and girl children*

*Venezuela: developing inter-sectorial networks*

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# Introducing *Early Childhood Matters*

*This edition of Early Childhood Matters, the first under a new name and wearing new clothes, is actually the eighty-eighth edition of the Bernard van Leer Foundation's periodic Newsletter.*

*It acknowledges and confirms the evolution of the Newsletter from an in-house publication addressed solely to Foundation-supported projects and staff, to a significant periodical addressed primarily to practitioners in the field of early childhood development (ECD).*

It also signals our resolution to rethink our products and to improve our performance in accentuating relevant experiences in ECD, and in disseminating them widely to practitioners and policy makers. At the same time, we have grasped this opportunity to redesign the format so that we can reflect a more contemporary, uniform, accessible and relevant feel.

The new look inevitably heralds some changes. The first is perhaps not so much a change as a significant enhancement: through surveys, many of

our readers have made it clear that they particularly value articles written by project staff and other practitioners that draw directly on their experiences with young children. We will continue to publish these. However, we would also like to generate responses and reactions to the articles, and thereby to open up debates. If we have learnt anything in the years that we have been committed to early childhood it is that there is rarely just one right way to do something. Other perspectives are always needed and our readership – mostly practitioners and policy makers themselves – must provide these.

The second change is to make more regular use of outside authors. This will help us to present a range of different perspectives and approaches, including some from the range of disciplines associated with early childhood development. Ideally, these authors will be able to combine practical, first hand experience with a more comprehensive perspective. However, we will not always agree with the views expressed. This first edition of Early Childhood

(China)  
"Hebei Province rural Pre-  
school Programme"  
photo: Rien van Gendt







(Namibia)

photo courtesy of Oxfam, copyright Glenn Edwards  
(an entry for the Poster Competition)

Matters gives a flavour of the range of articles that we will be publishing.

The third change is to utilise Early Childhood Matters as the primary vehicle to share pertinent and insightful perspectives on an issue that is of central importance to all who are concerned with development: 'Effectiveness'. By that we mean: 'What has been tried? What works? What doesn't?' The Foundation anticipates seriously and profoundly exploring this overarching issue from an ECD perspective, through this periodical.

Thus we expect to explore effectiveness through concrete themes in which early childhood projects have gained considerable knowledge and insight. In order to do justice to the fact that all of these are multi-faceted, we have decided that we will explore each theme over several editions of Early Childhood Matters. This allows for adequate mapping, a crucial element of which will

be the inclusion of the reactions, perspectives and insights of our readers. Another change is to give increased prominence to photographs of early childhood work. For these photographs we are indebted principally to the projects that the Foundation supports.

Finally, let me say that it is very important to us to keep carefully attuned to the needs of our readership. To do this we will be establishing a Resonance Group that will systematically provide critical feedback. In addition, we welcome your criticisms and inputs to help us develop Early Childhood Matters further.

The knowledge, experiences, insights, reactions and lessons learnt, especially of practitioners engaging with and for young children, are essential if we are to produce a periodical that is useful to you. ○

*Rien van Gendt,  
Executive Director  
Bernard van Leer Foundation*

# *In this edition*

In this first edition of *Early Childhood Matters* we are focusing on a issue that is of paramount importance to all who are involved in development: 'Effectiveness'. In early childhood development (ECD), this could be taken in many ways. For example, we could look at whether it is effective to work with young children at all, and we could do that by trying to identify the sorts of benefits that result and for whom. We could also look at how effective the Foundation is in supporting work with young children – for example, do we choose the most appropriate projects to support and, if so, what is it that makes these projects so appropriate?

Early Childhood Matters will always draw most of its material from actual work with children, their families and their communities. We are therefore staying close to the practice

in a range of articles, each of which has been written by someone with a great deal of experience in his or her particular area, and who has very clear ideas about what is effective in ECD and why.

The first two articles are intended to guide the construction of programmes of work. We start with Judith Evans, Director of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development. She uses her unique position at the centre of a comprehensive early childhood network to identify basic social principles, principles of child development and learning, and operational principles, each of which she puts forward as essential components in effective programming. In doing so, she invites a number of questions. For example: are all of these components always appropriate in all settings?

What might have to be dropped?  
What might have to be added?  
(page 8)

Fred Wood, Director of Education of the Department of Programs, Save the Children Federation, USA, then takes us from global theory through his reflections about what has actually happened in practice over the past decades, and what this means for effectiveness today. Drawing on experience, he concludes that programmes must acknowledge that children, rich or poor, live in and respond to complex and varied environments; that parents and communities must be regarded as key resources; and that ECD programmes must be supported and sustained as part of a broad network of community services. (page 12)

But how effective are such approaches likely to be? In the third

Promesa/Choco 111' project





(Portugal)  
'Isolated schools' Project  
photo: Jim Smale

article we are fortunate to have a first hand perspective from Fina Miragaya Paz, a mother who, with her four children, has participated in the 'Preescolar Na Casa' (Pre-school in the home) project, Spain, for 14 years. She shows that effectiveness means bringing about positive changes for people and their communities, changes that are not always predictable and cannot therefore be planned for. In many important ways, her article is a vindication of approaches that demand the full participation of parents and communities, and that set ECD close to the heart of wider development. It is also a testament to her own dedication to the well-being of young children and to her community over many years. (page 18)

The next three articles discuss strategies or strategic approaches in particular contexts. For example, Louise Derman-Sparks, as Director of the 'Anti-bias Leadership' project, USA, takes the view that if ECD work is to be

effective, it must include work on racism and bias. She explores the ways in which racist behaviour invades many areas of young children's lives in the USA, and then goes on to offer guidelines for direct action. For her, that direct action necessarily involves the participation of children and their families. Again, many questions will arise, especially for those working in cultural settings that offer young children very different environments and experiences. (page 20)

For their part, Jill Mitchell, Director of Early Childhood Teacher Education Programmes at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, and Paula Nimpuno-Parente of the Foundation's Africa Desk, explore the complexities of developing an effective national curriculum for ECD in multicultural societies. Jill Mitchell was obliged to sometimes rely on her understanding of the views of Maori and Pacific Islander cultures for the purposes of this discussion. She demonstrates

that there are core elements in the curriculum that can and should be sustained in all cultural settings. She also shows that a multicultural curriculum can remain cohesive, even when it is designed to be extensively revised and modified locally in line with cultural needs and expectations. (page 24)

Many of the indigenous peoples of Mexico suffer from the effects of poverty, migration, lack of job opportunities and social marginalisation. However, Martha Patricia Pimentel Garcia, Director General of the 'Unidad de Capacitación e Investigación Educativa para la Participación' (Organisation for Training and Research for Participation), Mexico, believes that effective project work must be based on even wider social and cultural realities. For her, what is also needed is an understanding of gender issues, and the attitudes, behaviour and values that are associated with these. She describes two recently developed projects that feature programmes





(Namibia)  
photo courtesy of Oxfam, copyright Glenn Edwards  
(an entry for the Poster Competition)

of work centred on women and girl children. It will be interesting to see just how effective these projects will be in an environment that scarcely favours such an emphasis: we very much hope to feature a follow-up article from her as experiences are accumulated. (page 28)

The last article is about meeting Venezuela's pledge to provide effective pre-school facilities for its children. Jesús Leonardo Yanez, as National Director of Pre-school Education, believes that the only realistic way of doing this is by building on experiences gained in the informal sector. He shows that this means integrating informal approaches with the formal provisions that do exist, and making use of any and all local resources. He also takes a strong, practical line in describing and analysing some of the real and perceived difficulties that have arisen, looking especially at overcoming the credibility

problems that informal approaches have encountered. (page 33)

There are a number of threads that run through most of these articles – for example: the need to consider children in their particular contexts and environments; the importance of family and community in all aspects of programming; and the need to set early childhood development work within broader community development programmes. That does not mean to say that the articles offer definitive statements about what can or should be done in all situations; rather they are putting forward strongly argued positions that invite further debate. If you would like to contribute to this debate, please contact me, as Editor of *Early Childhood Matters*, at the address shown on the inside front cover.

In future editions, we will continue to explore effectiveness through

consideration of themes in which Foundation-supported projects have considerable experience. For example, we wish to feature experiences in designing, implementing and assessing culturally relevant approaches in ECD – after all, if an approach is not culturally relevant, is there any way in which it can be effective?

In conclusion, I would like to draw your attention to an announcement about the results of a competition that we held last year to find photographs for the Foundation's series of posters. (page 40) This produced a marvellous response and I am very pleased to feature some of the entries in this edition of *Early Childhood Matters*. )

*Jim Smale*  
Editor, *Early Childhood Matters*



A young San  
pre-school child  
(Botswana)  
photo: Matthias Hufer  
(an entry for the  
Junior Competition)



# Effectiveness: *th*

Fifteen years ago, it was necessary to dwell at length on answers to the question 'Why invest in ECCD programmes?' because considerable scepticism existed regarding the value of early interventions. Moreover, children's experiences during the early years were thought by many to be the exclusive province of families and not the province of government or others. Today, scepticism, although still present to an important degree, appears to be diminishing, challenged by a growing body of knowledge on the benefits of early investment, by the development of successful programmes, and by new demands related to changing economic, social, demographic, political and educational conditions and ways of thinking.

When it comes to effectiveness in early childhood care and development (ECCD), there is no single model that could be appropriately applied to all settings. However, it is generally accepted that programmes that expect to benefit young children must be embedded within their families, their community, and their cultural values; and that they must support children in the development of the physical, mental, and social abilities that will enable them to

survive and thrive in later years. In this article, I will discuss some basic social principles, some principles of child development and learning, and some operational principles that it is now believed should guide programming.

## Social principles

With respect to statements about social principles, it is useful to take into account the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Declaration of the World Conference on Education for All (EFA), the Summit on Children, the Salamanca Declaration, and others. The following

statements have their roots in affirmations found in the outcomes of these world conferences and conventions:

- Children, by reason of their physical and mental immaturity, need special safeguards and care. Children living in especially difficult circumstances need special consideration.
- All children, without distinction of gender, race, language, religion or of any other kind, should have the opportunity to develop to their full potential.
- Parents and families (however defined) – men as well as women – have the primary responsibility for the upbringing, development and education of their children.
- Governments should establish a policy environment which enables families and communities to fulfil their responsibilities of child rearing and protection.

# tate of the art

Judith L Evans

## Principles of child

## development and learning

With respect to principles of child development and learning, effectiveness depends on understanding some key factors in child development. For example, we have to remember that from the moment of conception important developments occur that affect the brain, the physical body, and the chemistry of the child; and that learning is occurring at birth. Children are born with physical, social and psychological capacities allowing them to communicate, learn and develop. If these capacities are not recognised and supported they will wither rather than improve.

We also have to remember that development has several inter-related dimensions, and learning occurs in each of these areas. The areas include physical, cognitive, social, spiritual and emotional development, each of which influence the other and all of which are developing simultaneously – progress

in one area affects progress in others. Likewise, when something goes wrong in any one of those areas, it impacts all the other areas. For example: children who are malnourished may be less able to learn; children with learning problems frequently have low self-esteem; and so on.

At the same time, we also know that development proceeds in predictable steps and learning occurs in recognised sequences – although there is a great deal of individual and social variability in children's rates of development and styles of learning. This means that it is important for adults to use methods that fit with the child's growth pattern, not only in the cognitive area, but also in the affective, perceptual and motor areas; and that, in general, activities should provide the child with a developmentally appropriate challenge.

It also means that interventions promoting social, emotional and spiritual development, as well as cognitive learning, need to provide

varied forms of learning, consistent with the culture, even while taking into account that there are recognised sequences and activities that facilitate learning.

Fundamental to effectiveness is the fact that development and learning occur continuously as a result of the child interacting with people and objects in his or her environment. Here, the roles of adults (at home and in other settings) in supporting children's learning are to be emotionally responsive to, and involved with, children; and to provide them with opportunities to work with concrete objects, to make choices, to explore things and ideas, and to experiment and discover. Children also need opportunities to interact with peers and adults in an environment that provides them with security and acceptance.

Closely linked to the above is the recognition that children are active participants in their own development and learning. Learning and related

development involves the child's construction of knowledge, not an adult's imposition of information. The skills that are the basis for constructing knowledge improve with practice. It is important for children to have opportunities to construct their own knowledge through exploration, interaction with materials and imitation of role models.

Lastly, we cannot overlook the fact that children live within a context – family, community, culture – and that their needs are most effectively addressed in relation to that context. Support to the family and community can help children. Given the importance of the environment in promoting children's learning, interventions can also aim to improve the child's environment, perhaps by focusing on increasing family income, upgrading health and sanitation in the community, and enhancing the social and political setting.

#### Operational principles

With respect to operational principles, given the nature of child development and what is known about the outcomes of quality ECCD programmes, the following principles need to be applied to achieve maximum benefits. Some of these are directly related to the principles of development and learning, while others are general principles that apply to ECCD programmes as well as other social development programmes.

#### ECCD programmes should:

##### *begin with what exists and build from there*

Programmes are sustainable when they are built on the known factors/ experiences in people's lives; while programmes that introduce ideas and practices that are too foreign seldom take hold. ECCD programmes should build on the strengths of communities. These include: traditional family units and social structures that can be mobilised; rich traditional practices that are supportive of children's growth and development; the strong desire of parents to provide the best for their children; the desire of people for education and knowledge; and the

networks that have been created as a result of the fact that many people belong to churches and religious organisations. When people feel that their current practices and beliefs are respected and recognised, it gives them confidence to entertain other ways of doing things.

##### *be developed within a broad conceptual framework and form a part of a comprehensive, multi-faceted strategy*

There is unity in children's needs. Therefore, ECCD programmes should be part of a broad conceptual effort that addresses the needs of children from birth through the early primary years. Effectiveness requires integrated attention to children, and a maximising of resources through multi-dimensional programmes that combine health, nutrition, education and social actions. To do this, a variety of relationships can be established that build on what exists and help fill the gaps in services.

##### *be flexible*

This principle derives from a recognition of the continuity of children's experience and the importance of attending to all stages of development,

while at the same time recognising the social and individual variation in children's needs: it is neither necessary nor appropriate for all children to receive the same kind of early childhood services.

##### *be developed with the families*

A critical part of children's environment is the family. Support from and for the family is crucial to healthy growth and development. Thus in programming it is important to have an understanding of children within their natural environment. Children need to be understood within the context of their family (however that is defined); and, if it is going to provide the best possible care for its children, the family needs resources. Also, programmes must support parents in their parenting role.

##### *be developed with the community*

A growing body of experience shows that community participation increases the effectiveness of most programmes. Community participation also allows extension of the services beyond what would be possible using only the budgets and resources of the public sector. Specifically, community-based programmes build local capacity to

identify needs and seek solutions; create ownership and accountability; encourage unity and strength within the community; enhance the probability that decisions will be implemented and that programmes will be maintained once initial outside support is withdrawn; and empower people to make decisions in relation to all aspects of their lives.

##### *be developed with an understanding of the wider environment*

To focus only on children, family and community still limits what can be accomplished. These exist within a wider environment – that of the nation. The economic, social, political and cultural dimensions of the nation have an impact on whether or not children thrive. To provide appropriate programming for young children and their families, this total context must be taken into account.

##### *provide equity in access*

While the aim is to provide universal attention to young children, there is special recognition of children living in conditions that put them at increased risk of delayed or debilitated

development. This may mean that the needier have readier access to resources.

#### *reflect diversity*

This principle is derived from a recognition of the cultural diversity which exists within a given country. The actual form the programme takes will vary depending on local and regional needs and resources. Out of respect for this diversity, ECCD programmes will necessarily differ.

#### *employ a variety of strategies*

Individual and social variations, taken together with the changing nature of the child during the early childhood period, lead to the conclusion that there is no one programme formula. Complementary strategies should be developed and implemented to meet ECCD goals. These include: providing support to the family; community development (empowerment) efforts; strengthening institutions that work with families; and advocacy for the implementation of national policies that are supportive of young children and their families.

#### *ensure quality*

A quality programme is one that is appropriate to the child's stage of development and addresses the needs of the child, while respecting individual differences. In seeking quality, it should be recognised that quality is affected by the motivation and training of programme personnel, the physical environment, the materials used, the curriculum, and the support available to providers. It is essential that quality not be lost as a result of trying to implement inadequately funded models and/or increase the coverage of proven models. Without quality costs will be incurred later on, in schooling and by society: low quality programmes are ineffective, deprive children of benefits, and represent a waste of resources.

#### *be cost-effective*

Resources need to be used efficiently and effectively. Relatively low-cost, yet effective, programme options can be created that are economically feasible over time. In general, strategies that stress prevention are more cost-effective than compensatory strategies. In many cases, an ECCD component can be folded into an existing structure at marginal extra cost.

#### *have sustainable benefits*

Every effort should be made to see that the gains a child makes within a programme are sustained. This means paying attention to where children have come from before entering a programme and where they will go after the programme. Without attention to the transitions in children's lives, the gains made in one setting can be lost in another. Attention to the transitions will help ensure a strong relationship between what happens to children in a programme in terms of their development and later measures of development or 'success'.

#### *Conclusions*

Scientific research establishes the importance of promoting healthy development during the early years and demonstrates that programmes of integrated attention to early development offer an extraordinary opportunity to avoid or moderate developmental problems, bringing lasting benefits to individuals and society.

**The author:** Judith E. Evans is the Director of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development (CGECCD). The CGECCD is an international inter-agency group dedicated to improving the conditions of young children at risk, that grounds its work in a cross-disciplinary view of child care and development. It was launched in 1984 and its main purposes are the synthesising and dissemination of information on early childhood care and development, and the fostering of communication among international donor agencies and their national counterparts, and among decision makers, funders, researchers, programme providers, parents and communities. The goal is to strengthen programmes that benefit young children and their families.

This article was adapted by the author from a much fuller treatment of the field of early childhood care and development that will shortly appear on *ecdgroup.com*. The CGECCD has a website on Internet that contains a very wide range of materials about all aspects of early childhood. The address is: [www.ecdgroup.com](http://www.ecdgroup.com). The CGECCD also publishes *The coordinator's notebook*, an international resource for early childhood development. Further details about any of these products can be obtained from Dr Judith E. Evans, 6 The Lodge, Haverhill, MA 01039, USA. Tel: +1-413-268-3272, Fax: +1-413-268-3229.



# Communities at the forefront

AW Wood

**Dr Fred Wood worked with the Bernard van Leer Foundation at senior level on programme development and operations for 21 years. This included 12 years in charge of operations and programmes, and four years as Director of Programme Development and Training; and culminated in three years as Deputy Executive Director of the Foundation.**

**In 1991 he moved to the United States to take up a senior post with the Save the Children Federation, where he is now Director of Education, Department of Programs.**

The case for early childhood development (ECD) has traditionally rested on one of two premises. The first premise perceived ECD as part of the systematic preparation of the young child for primary school, with the implicit aim of compensating for a supposed mismatch between the child's home background and the assumptions upon which primary schooling were based. The second premise viewed ECD as a substitute for the family, a protective environment that would liberate women in particular from the immediate childcare duty and allow rapid reintegration of new mothers into the work force.

Whichever way it was perceived, ECD was a social welfare mechanism, protecting the child against inadequacies in family and community. Both views derive from the notion of the all-caring, all-providing state, whether this be capitalist France or socialist China. Except in a few rare instances – for example, Mexico's national programme of 'non-

scholarised' early childhood education directed at mothers of children in the first two years of life – the importance of ECD as a systematic effort to positively influence children's development at this crucial stage has seldom been acknowledged as a feasible programmatic goal. In consequence, the critical significance of the earliest years of life as a fundamental adjunct to ➤ fullest brain development as the foundation for learning capacity and competence, remains a largely untouched area of endeavour.

Ironically, over the past twenty years this has coincided with a major increase internationally in the number of programmes directed at infancy, largely under the heading of 'Child Survival', and spearheaded by UNICEF and other international agencies. These programmes have largely sought to meet physical needs, and have largely excluded those psychological and social development activities that would, in practice, enrich and strengthen the impact of such programmes.

## Missed opportunity

Several background factors illustrate the extent of this missed opportunity. The primary factor is that brain research in recent years has gone even further in increasing our understanding of the relative importance of the earliest years, underlining the fact that we may be too late when pre-school interventions are predominantly focused on four and five year old children.

On a more practical level, a second factor is that traditional early childhood development programmes – typified by the Bernard van Leer Foundation's efforts at constructing 'model' pre-school centres in South Africa in the 1970s – reveal a pattern of high-cost, infrastructure-heavy approaches, with curricula laid down by highly qualified professionals and propagated through service delivery normally demanding high levels of professional knowledge. For policy makers in poor countries this conventional stereotype rules out ECD programmes as a serious programme option.

The third factor that I will deal with here, is that prevailing ECD models frequently do not include the family or community. Yet research has increasingly emphasised the crucial importance of family and community sharing in the early development of young children. Indeed the so-called daycare model often sought to accommodate the absence of parents and, by definition, the overriding importance of the employment needs of adults. The emergence in mainland China of residential daycare, catering for young children throughout the working week, is significant in this respect.

#### **Policy makers and ECD**

These are the kinds of arguments that point to the fact that, after forty years of theorising and modelling, in the eyes of many policy makers the case for ECD is at best still not proven. There are several reasons for this. First, as I have said, the costs of providing centre-based, academically oriented pre-schools are seen to be prohibitive, except for the wealthiest and most

ideologically motivated countries. When efforts are made to pass these costs on to the consumer, these programmes become inaccessible to families whose first priority is meeting basic needs (former Soviet Union countries provide many examples of this).

The second reason is that they are seen to have a narrow focus on pre-academics, and this does not go far enough in meeting the needs of children in circumstances where the effects of poverty are characterised and magnified by poor nutrition, disease and stressful psycho-social environments.

The third reason is that ECD programmes often lack significant parent and community involvement – they are seen to be ignoring children's first educators, and readily available and highly effective local resources. The evidence is already clear that the direct involvement of adult and community members in ECD efforts has beneficial effects on adult and

(Botswana)  
photo: Matthias Hoyer  
(an entry for the Poster Competition)



community development, as well as on the ECD programmes themselves. Save the Children's recent experience in Nepal and Thailand – where, significantly, programmes are tightly focused on infancy – strongly suggests

include six-year-olds. An additional 'preparatory' summer programme of a few weeks only is offered so as to acclimatise children to primary school. This significant national effort, heavily supported by the international banks,

more likely to reflect the social, cultural and economic context from which they derive. Admittedly 'community-based' is a much over-used term. Here it implies 'conceived and planned by communities; engaging communities directly in delivery, supervision and maintenance of programmes; and impacting both communities and their children in a manner which draws upon what communities are'.

benefits to children, families and communities, if the calibre or quality of such programmes is a consequence of blending local culture and knowledge with external best practices. There are many such benefits. For example, by experiencing success in positively affecting their children's development, even the poorest families gain a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence which motivates them to address their own development needs. Women in particular find new ways of self-realisation and indeed, in some cases, employment. Communities come to see themselves as action agents competently assessing their own problems and responding to them. The work of 'Proyecto PROMESA' in Colombia's Choco Province, supported by the Foundation in the 1980s, is in many respects a trail breaker in this sense: it had a sharp focus on infancy, on mothers, and on spill-over effects in terms of complementary areas such as health and institution-building. Yet the totality of the PROMESA experience remains undocumented.

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*The programme has investigated how traditional childcare skills can be enhanced.*  
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that reinforcing ECD efforts with complementary non-formal adult education has a multiplier effect on both participation and impact.

At policy level, the implications of missed opportunities are often not fully realised. For example, conscious discouragement of parent participation is apparent in some ECD programmes, and this is also true at primary school level, especially in the world's poorest countries; while, in the Philippines, a systematic effort has been made by the government to lower the age of initial primary school enrolment so as to

still remains tied to the flawed concept that the conventional primary school curriculum can be usefully pushed downwards into a lower age range, while ignoring the critical needs of infancy.

#### **A new perspective**

What then is the basis for another perspective? Children, rich and poor, live in and respond to complex and varied environments. ECD programmes that are supported and sustained as part of a broad network of community services are likely to be more effective. Community-based ECD programmes are

Unlike traditional ECD approaches, community-based programmes – which by definition must include skills development and capacity building for adults – enable people to organise around the issues they themselves have identified and to generate their own 'solutions'. Communities learn to draw on appropriate internal and external resources so as to build pertinent, quality ECD programmes. When local ownership is ensured, communities themselves will ensure the sustainability of programmes.

On the impact side, community-based ECD programmes can provide multiple



(South Africa)  
photo courtesy of the 'Learning for all' Project  
(an entry for the Poster Competition)

### **Principles into practice**

Applying these principles and lessons in established operational contexts around the world poses a particular set of problems to an international NGO like Save the Children. Based on the above, the fundamental thrust of the Save the Children programme is that local people and local groups, must do the job of service delivery themselves. Save the Children's prime task is to motivate them to that end. After that, it reverts to a supportive – perhaps discreetly formative – role, but does not assume the responsibility for service delivery: this rightly rests with others.

On the whole, Save the Children's programme making has sought to adhere to these principles, bearing in mind the working reality in which it must operate. Market pressures oblige the organisation to deploy its stock of ideas in pursuit of opportunities in educational development as these

arise: after all, the principles have broader relevance than to ECD alone. This is perhaps the sharpest lesson of the last few years. The Village School approach which has proven so successful in Mali, Malawi and Burkina Faso – and which is now spreading into Guinea, Morocco and Ghana – rests on these working premises, even if the Village School idea itself does not embrace the totality of the conceptual model.

Despite this, there are opportunities to probe into how a strong early childhood focus can be grafted on to a programme which has its initial focus elsewhere, as in Mali and in El Salvador. In Mali, village-based childcare is a responsibility of grandmothers freed from the obligations of field work. The programme has investigated how traditional childcare skills can be enhanced. In El Salvador, local community education associations have embraced the idea of 'school for parents' with the intention of strengthening the home background. Plans are now in hand to add an initial





(South Africa)

photo courtesy of the 'Learning for all' Project  
(an entry for the Poster Competition)

education component to the programme of community controlled primary schools.

'Project Entry Point' in Nepal again reveals several of the principles more explicitly. Women form literacy groups (a two-year programme) after which they move on together in pursuit of collective economic development aims. The demands of their economic tasks oblige women's groups to devise local solutions to their childcare needs. Save the Children's role here became facilitative, providing training support to local level childcare groups.

In Thailand, the same basic issue - that of women's increasing engagement in production - pushed Save the Children one step further. Thailand had formulated a national family development policy and programme. It had a nationwide scope and consciously addressed the needs of mothers and young children. In this instance, Save the Children's role became demonstrative, taking the stated national programme aims, piloting

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*There are opportunities to probe into how a strong early childhood focus can be grafted on to a programme which has its initial focus elsewhere ...*

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them in one district, sharing in the national level evaluation together with UNICEF and, as a result of this, formulating well-founded operational principles that would permit the effective nationwide operation of the programme. These illustrations point the way ahead for Save the Children in education.

#### **Restrictions and ways around them**

An international NGO with modest resources cannot aspire to deliver large-scale programmes on its own, nor, philosophically, is this a desirable aim at this time. But such an organisation, with strong local connections and with the technical capability can:

- 1 Use its limited operational funds to engage in model development; and
- 2 Build upon demonstrated models to prompt or reinforce policy changes.

The latter function requires engagement with the major funding agencies, public and private, to help shape emerging field programmes in line with the principles outlined.

The strategic inter-institutional collaboration that was developed between the Bernard van Leer Foundation, UNICEF, UNESCO and Save the Children, around issues of leadership development in ECD in Africa, displays another dimension to this approach. In this case networks were combined to ensure that commonly held ideas on capacity development through ECD, strongly influenced a cadre of African ECD leaders in selected countries. It remains an open question whether the selected cadre, given its general identification with the traditional education service, was the ideal medium for this capacity-building effort. Equally questionable is whether the leadership development effort, as mounted, had the level of intensity needed to bring about the degree of change envisaged.

On another level, the Uganda 'Nutrition and early childhood development' programme, the El Salvador 'Educación inicial' (Initial education) programme (with Proyecto EDUCO), and Bolivia's 'Programa de Atención al Niño' (PAN - Programme of Attention to Children) are

all examples of new partnerships for Save the Children. Indeed they go further: they are partnerships between a major NGO, international development banks and national governments, in which Save the Children's involvement - at both planning and implementation level - demands that it has the capacity to convince others of the value of working through community structures, and paying attention to the needs of the earliest years. An example from Africa is a powerful illustration of Save the Children's working principles in large-scale application: the World Bank and the Ugandan Ministry of Planning agreed to set up a national programme, without a heavy infrastructure, to work through local frameworks to address the related physical and psychological needs of very young children in Uganda. This marks a distinct step forward.

## *Some conclusions*

Spain: playing my part

# A mother's experiences in an ECD programme

Fina Miragaya Paz

My name is Fina Miragaya Paz and my husband is called Manuel Cazas Guizán. We live, together with my father-in-law, in Cazas, a small parish in the area of Xermade. My husband and his father are carpenters, working in a small workshop that is part of the house. They make furniture and repair other items as well.

We always had a small cattle business, just three or four cows; that is what the work of us women mostly has to be. However, following

the illness of my mother-in-law and her death in January 1997, we sold them.

We have four children: José Manuel, 17 years old; twins, Angel and Miguel aged 15; and the smallest one, Laura, who is ten. All of them took part with me in the Preescolar Na Casa programme. José Manuel and I started when he was three years old and at five he went on to the public school in Xermade.

At that time, the person who was organising this was José Louis Parga and he came to our house one day to invite us to take part in meetings about our children. We didn't know anything about 'Preescolar Na Casa' in the beginning, so this seemed a bit strange to us. He also talked about meetings every 15 days – something that didn't seem to us to be very much. But he was accompanied by our parish priest who also encouraged us, so we decided to go just to see what would happen.

The old school is a very cold place, so we soon decided to have the meetings in our house. This meant that other families came to

our house too. Over the following years, the twins and then Laura also took part. Laura started when she was very small – a bit less than one year old. But young children always learn to socialise easily with other children and with adults. She was always a very sociable child, even though children are very isolated in this area and hardly have any contact with other children.

My husband and I have always been concerned about the education of our children, and we have always been ready to help them and have tried to be fully informed about how we can support them. I always found that the meetings organised by Preescolar Na Casa were a good place in which to get to know your neighbours. Well not just to get to know them, but to talk together, to deepen our friendships and improve our relationships.

At the meetings we talked about themes related to the education of our children and about other themes that worried us. We played with the children and took part in



A welcome chance to learn from others  
(Spain) 'Preescolar Na Casa' project

photo: Jim Smale

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Supportive parents make a big difference (Spain)  
Preescolar Na Casa project  
photo: Jim Smale

activities together. At the end of the series of meetings, we went on an excursion to get to know each other better, and to meet other parents and children from other parishes and townships.

**What did we get from the programme?**

By being involved in the programme, we have been helped in a number of ways, as the following examples show.

- We learned to value education and dedicate ourselves more and in better ways to our children so that we could always help them as far as possible.
- We learned to give importance to their early years. Many times it could seem that the children were very small and that they weren't really getting into anything, but if you just stopped to watch them, you would see that

they learn from the moment they are born.

- We learned to stand alongside our children at every stage of their education. Now our children are older and doing advanced work that we can't help them directly with. But they know that we are right there with them and with their problems: if they have any worries we are always ready

to help them find their way and to encourage them.

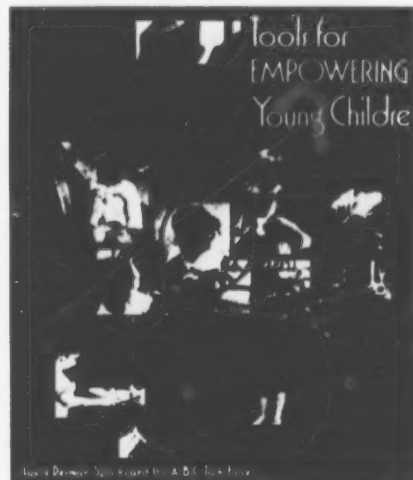
- We learned that some children are very good at relating to both children and adults, and have no problems in communicating.
- My husband belongs to the Parents' Association of the college, because we collaborate with the college in everything that is related to our children's education.
- In the parish where we live, we promote community activities in the old school. For example:
  - Information technology courses that my husband and children attend;
  - Typewriting courses that my daughter Laura also attends;
  - English lessons;
  - Courses in sewing and dress-making;
  - Cooking courses;
  - Games tournaments;
  - Theatrical presentations and parties.

I can honestly say that participation in the Preescolar Na Casa programme has been positive for my family!



# Standing up for fairness: activism wi

**The author** is a long-time faculty member of Pacific Oaks College, California, and Director of the 'Anti-bias Education Leadership project'. She has published extensively on anti-racist and anti-bias issues, always taking a strong and accessible line that her readers can consider in relation to their local situations and environments. She has just published a collection of narratives from teachers about using an anti-bias approach in their classrooms.<sup>1</sup> Dr Derman-Sparks lectures, conducts workshops and seminars, and works as a consultant throughout the United States and in many other countries, including Australia, South Africa, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.



The pre-school years lay the foundation for the development in children of a strong, confident sense of self, of empathy, of positive attitudes towards people different from themselves, and of social interaction skills. However, pervasive institutional and

interpersonal racism and other forms of oppression in our society sabotage healthy development in these areas. Early childhood teachers and parents must help children learn how to resist these.

One way to do this is to involve children in activism activities that are appropriate to their interests and abilities. The Anti-bias Curriculum, developed by a multi-ethnic group of early childhood educators in Southern California, suggests ways that teachers and parents can do so (Derman-Sparks and the ABC Task Force, 1989).

The four goals of the Anti-bias Curriculum are to:

- 1 Nurture each child's construction of a knowledgeable, confident self-concept and group identity;

- 2 Promote each child's comfortable, empathic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds;
- 3 Foster each child's critical thinking about bias; and
- 4 Cultivate each child's ability to stand up for her or himself and for others in the face of bias.

These four goals interact with and build on each other. For children to feel proud and confident about who they are, they need to develop a variety of ways for responding to prejudice and discrimination directed against themselves. For children to develop empathy and respect for diversity, they also need a variety of ways to interrupt prejudice and discrimination they see directed at others. Through activism activities children learn that injustice is not overcome by magic or by wishes, but by people making it happen and that each one of them can make it happen.

Young children have an impressive capacity for learning how to act on behalf of themselves and others – if adults provide activities that are

relevant to them, and that match their developmental and cultural learning styles. Effective activities arise out of children's lives – including the history that their ethnic group has in working for justice – and fit their cognitive, emotional, and behavioural abilities. Choices about activities should take into account the various beliefs that families have about appropriate ways to take social action, and the beliefs that they have about the role of children in these activities. Time should first be taken to discuss with staff and parents the purpose of activism activities, and collaborate on which activities might best fit the children's experiences, age, and background. The underlying goal should be kept in mind: to provide children with opportunities to experience their ability to take action for themselves and others, thus fostering a habit of empowerment.

The following guidelines have proved effective for those who are working with young children.

- 1 Be alert to unfair practices in your school or community that directly affect the children's lives. These can be related to any aspect of children's identity and

# Young children

Louise Derman-Sparks

well-being. They may directly involve an incident in the classroom/centre, or relate to a problem that comes from the children's wider community. Children may bring an incident to your attention. For example, a kindergarten teacher explains a method she uses:

*'I teach my children to call on friends when they are faced with an unfair situation. For example, last week two boys were playing on the rope swing, and two girls were waiting for a long time. The girls kept asking for a turn, and the boys ignored them. I watched and waited to see what would happen. Finally, the girls came to me and complained. I asked them, "What should we do? I could go and stop them, but that won't help you in the future." One girl then said, "Maybe we could get some of our friends to help us." I responded, "Yes, that's a good idea." The two girls collected about four children, girls and boys, and with their friends around them told the boys to give them a turn. The boys got off the swings and complained to me that they had been chased off. I talked with the two boys about what they had done to create the need for the girls to get their friends to help them.'*

Staff may raise an issue, sometimes spontaneously. For example, another kindergarten teacher wrote:

*'One activity we did was to paint over a wall in a park that had racial slurs written on it. The day we saw it, I stopped the group and said, "Do you know what is written on this wall? It makes me very angry." I read the words, we talked about what they meant, how they are very hurtful to people. Then we talked about what we could do and decided to paint over the words, which we did the next day. We probably could have written to the Parks Department, telling them about the wall and what we did. It would have been interesting to see what kind of response we got.'*

Issues may also arise from larger community concerns. For example, children and families around the nation have joined early childhood teachers in 'Worthy Wage Day' activities. (One strategy of a nationwide Worthy Wages campaign to improve salaries and working conditions of pre-school and childcare teachers.) While this issue springs from staff concerns, it directly affects the well-being of children and families. In Pasadena, children in

several childcare centres learned what worthy wages meant, made posters and banners, and joined together at the steps of the City Hall. There, representatives of the city government and some of their teachers and parents spoke about why better wages are necessary for childcare centre staff.

**2 Consider the interests and developmental abilities of your group of children.** Will the problem grab their attention? Is the issue developmentally appropriate for them? Do the methods fit the way young children learn?

For example, an activism activity in one pre-school programme began when one of the children was hospitalised because he had eaten a bottle of vitamins he thought was sweets. When the teacher, the following morning, explained why the child was absent, the children talked about confusing vitamins with sweets, and how that could happen.

They decided that they didn't think it was fair for vitamins to look and taste like sweets, and dictated a letter to the manufacturer about their concerns. They also sent a copy of the letter to their families. (Of course, they also sent



'Celebrating Children's Rights Week' (Venezuela) 'PACMAN' project

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... children must believe themselves that a particular situation or incident is unfair for an activism activity to be an educational experience.

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Celebrating the opening of the Family Centre at Washington Beach (USA) Boston Housing project

'get well' pictures and letters to the recuperating child.)

**3 Consider your own comfort.** Is the issue one that you feel comfortable addressing? What type of activities do you prefer? There is a wide spectrum of possibilities — making changes in your own working space is one. For example, a group of four to six year olds created a 'handicapped parking' space in their school's parking lot, and then made tickets to put on cars inappropriately parked in the space. Activities such as

writing letters, speaking with people, circulating petitions, and participating in an appropriate demonstration, represent a second category of possibilities. Involving parents and other community people in reclaiming their culture and history is a third. In a programme for migrant families in California, staff collected favourite proverbs and stories from families and created books in Spanish, and in Spanish and English, for the children and for the parents. Children in a first through third grade, Los Angeles urban public school, interviewed activists in their community and then developed wall posters and books. These they photocopied to share with other children and with their families.

**4 Consider the parents' comfort.** Discuss with parents the reasons for activism activities and your approach to them. If parents express concerns, or disagree with activism activities in general, or with specific ones, take their concerns seriously. Try to find out what underlies their concerns. They may disagree with the topic of the activity, or perhaps with

the method, or they may be worried about how the topic affects their child's feelings. For example, after addressing issues of discrimination, children may come home sad or angry. You and the parents can consider ways to address these issues together that are honest but do not undermine children's hope for the future. Ask for suggestions about what activities you might use, problem solve together to reach a mutually acceptable solution, and invite the parents to participate in the activity.

**5 Engage children in a 'critical thinking' discussion about the problem.** Remember that children must believe themselves that a particular situation or incident is unfair for an activism activity to be an educational experience. For example, four year olds in a child development centre located on the campus of a church based college were looking through a new calendar that had arrived in the mail. One child remarked, "Those children do not look like us." The illustrations depicted only white children. The teacher replied, "You are really thinking. Which children

don't you see? Children called out the names of several classmates. They decided that it wasn't fair, and that they didn't want to use the calendar.

**6 Ask children for ideas about what they might do and include your own suggestions.** Choose one or a few activities that are safe, possible, and fit the needs of your particular group of children. The children with the 'calendar' problem decided to take pictures of their class and send it with a letter to the company that made the calendar, explaining their concerns and asking that next time the calendar shows all kinds of children.

An additional action might be deciding to adapt the calendar, by pasting other pictures or photos over several of the months, so that more diversity is depicted. Actions should make sense to the children, even if they are not what adults would do about a particular problem. Of course, they should also be safe for them to do.

One activity leads to further ones. When the children did not get a reply



Celebrating the Day of the Child (Colombia)  
'Onas' project

from the calendar company, they asked their teacher to call. When they still did not get a reply, the teacher told them about how adults use a petition to help make changes. The children liked the idea, wrote and illustrated their own petition and collected about one hundred names of college students on their campus. The petition got a reply – with a promise to try to make future calendars more diverse. Now we have to check to see if the promise was kept.

**7 Document your activities.** Take photos of your activities and ask the children to dictate explanations of what they did. Use them to make a wall chart or newsletter for parents. Make a book about 'Taking Action for Fairness' that the children can read to each other.

**8 Engage in adult activism activities yourself.** Modelling the habit of activism in our own lives, whether we be teachers or parents, is essential for helping children to learn about the role of activism in life. Pre-school age children who see family members trying to change injustices that affect their family's life, are more likely to

do the same when they experience an injustice directed against themselves or their friends. Examples include: organising with other people in the neighbourhood for a needed traffic light or cleaning up a neighbourhood park. As children move into elementary school, it is important for them to see family members joining with others to work for change on larger social problems, such as more housing for lower income families. This teaches empathy and responsibility for people beyond one's own family.

Similarly, teachers who incorporate activism into their lives communicate that a pro-active stance towards injustice is a desirable trait. Teachers can tell children about educational activism activities in which they are engaged, such as working with other teachers in the school to get more books about various ethnic groups, or participating in a campaign to improve salaries for childcare teachers. They can also share their experiences in activism work that affects the larger community. In sum, if we practice what we preach, our message will resonate the tone of authenticity!

**9 Always keep in mind that the underlying goal of activism activities with children is their empowerment, not the accomplishment of adult issues.** Activities should foster children's education and growth in the needed life skills of critical thinking, taking responsibility for acting to rectify unjust situations, and becoming responsible citizens of a democratic society.

*The above guidelines were adapted from: Lee E, Menkart D, and Okazawa-Rey M (1997) Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Approach to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development; Network of Educators on the Americas, Washington DC, USA.*

### Notes

1. Derman-Sparks L and Brinson-Phillips C (1997) Teaching/learning anti-racism: a developmental approach; Teachers College Press, Columbia University, New York. More details can be obtained from: Teachers College Press, PO Box 20, VT 05495-0020, USA.

2. Derman-Sparks L and the ABE Task Force (1989) Anti-bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children; NAEYC; Washington DC, USA.





'Learning traditional dances' (New Zealand)  
'Anau Ako Pasifika' project

Jill Mitchell (JM) is Director of the Early Childhood Teacher Education Programme at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. In this discussion with Paula Nimpuno Parente (PNP), of the Foundation's Africa Desk, and Jim Smale (JS), Editor of *Early Childhood Matters*, she explores aspects of the development and implementation of a national curriculum for early childhood development (ECD) in New Zealand, a country that is made up of a variety of different ethnic and cultural groupings.

## Developing a cultural

JM: When New Zealand became part of the British Empire, the Treaty of Waitangi was signed between the British Crown and Maori chiefs as representatives of the indigenous people. This was based on the concept of partnership and of Maori retaining ownership of land, rivers, and their language and other valued aspects of their culture. However, in the education system, the main delivery mode was English so many Maori never learned their own language. There have been whole generations now of people who have not learned their own Maori language. It's only over the last ten or fifteen years that there's really been a renaissance of the Maori language and the treaty has been referred to time and time again in an attempt to resolve issues. It has been fortunate that we had that treaty because now the land issues are in the process of being resolved through it, whereas in Australia the aboriginal people never had such a treaty.

*PNP: But what about access to resources? When we talk about recognition and respect, what sort of access do the Maoris*

*have today to resources that were taken away from them?*

JM: Well, aside from land matters – and here I'm speaking on behalf of Maori, which is something I would rather not do – I would say that there is still a very strong feeling that they do not have access to all the resources. There are people who say that they have had the same as everyone else in terms of their education and their schooling system. The question is how appropriate that has been.

*PNP: You have been heavily involved in developing a culturally appropriate curriculum. Who developed the Maori version of this?*

JM: Both Maori and non-Maori. But the Maori were extremely strong in their work, and not just with people working with early childhood, but with the Maori community at large. They were very influential. I think that it is crucial to recognise that it is not a translation, nor a translation with adaptations. The principles, the strands and the goals are similar but the

approach and philosophy reflect difference.

*PNP: What is the Maori concept of the individual? And of the family? How do they see their own part in it? I am asking you this because the curriculum contains several mentions of the development of the individual, but in our work with indigenous groups elsewhere we often find that there is no such thing as an individual. You are part of a group. Individuals are something new – they come with a particular system.*

JM: I can only give my perception, which of course is not a Maori perception, but in Maori culture the extended family and the community are the most important elements. That fits in very much with what you see in many other cultures. In the early childhood department of the university, members of the Maori group have far more responsibility outside their teaching roles than members of the non-Maori group do. They can be called upon by their community at any time and they see that as a huge responsibility. They have a different way

# appropriate curriculum

Jill Mitchell

of working and responding to community. It places a lot of demands and responsibilities on the individuals: there is a value that is placed on people as individuals and a value placed on them as members of a community that has a past, a present and a future.

*JS: How do parents fit into this curriculum? It is designed for children at the time of school entry and you emphasise enormously the importance of parents, but it is implemented through existing centres.*

JM: Some of our early childhood services are actually operated by parent cooperatives. One in particular – the Playcentre – is an organisation run by parents. They have their own training for parents; and the parents can and often do stay for most of the sessions.

They are also eligible for professional development and support. There are parents who assist in management of childcare centres, and Kohanga Reo (language nests) value the involvement of parents.

Involvement may be through newsletters, centre-home notebooks, parent notice boards, and also through direct links between parents and teachers or care givers. Certainly open communication is essential.

*JS: Are centres developing their own materials drawn from the curriculum, but specifically for use by parents, with parents?*

JM: Yes, slowly. Initially many materials were developed through the professional support opportunities, followed by further development in the early childhood centres. Material development is most common in those centres that have opted for the in-centre form of professional development.

*JS: When did the implementation of the curriculum start?*

JM: It was first used in a few centres in 1995, when it was in draft form. The curriculum was actually published in 1996 so it's still very early days; and it is still not considered necessary that anyone should grasp the whole of the

curriculum and try to work on it all. We're focusing more on some aspects and on developments in some areas, building on it as we go through it.

*PNP: In the regions that I know best kindergartens, pre-schools and centres reach a very limited group of children – sometimes only reach the children of the better off. The poor and the marginalised – possibly the children that need the most support – don't have access. What is the situation in New Zealand?*

JM: A very high proportion of children have access to early childhood services. But then we do have twenty six different services. The major ones are kindergartens, childcare, play centres, Kohanga Reo and home-based services, Montessori provisions, and many other programmes. Early childhood education is very well accepted by parents within New Zealand. However, there are groups like those you mention, with less access. We have a rural education programme for people who are dotted around the rural areas: New Zealand has quite a large rural population. We have many ways of

reaching out to them. For example, there may be a coordinator who will organise play groups; and there are mobile kindergartens.

There is also a distance early childhood service from a correspondence school. In addition, there is a 'Parents as First Teachers' programme (PAFT) that arranges a variety of opportunities for parents in the first three years of their children's lives. Recent statistics show that a good range of different socio-economic groups were using it. They now have a very high proportion of young single parents; and have worked very hard at adapting it for Maori and have a high proportion of Maori.

*PNP: Is the high coverage to do with resources and the way the services are subsidised?*

JM: The funding follows the child and does not depend on the type of service being used. As long as the service is chartered and licensed, the funding is the same. There are also subsidies for families in lower socio-economic situations.

'Making good use of old magazines' (New Zealand)  
'Anau Ako Pasifika' project



*PNP: Are these families mostly Maori or are they mixed?*

JM: Mixed, but there is a higher proportion of Maori in lower socio-economic groups in relation to their proportion of the population.

*JS: What about the curriculum's relevance to the Pacific Islander groupings and cultures?*

JM: Auckland is the largest centre for Pacific Islands cultures in the world. Initially we wanted to have a Pacific Islands curriculum, but each of the Pacific Island cultures is different. However, they are referred to specifically throughout the curriculum; and the idea of the curriculum is that it serves as a model for how to work with people from a range of different cultures.

*JS: In the implementation of this curriculum, does any conflict arise between what parents see as the 'right' way to bring up their children – which perhaps they've learned from other cultures – and the traditional Maori or Pacific Islander ways of bringing up children?*

JM: I think probably any culture that has had another culture coming in has picked up

some things that are not acceptable. Smacking children for example: that is against original Maori beliefs, yet in some families it has become an acceptable way of chastising. There's no way that we could have supported putting something like that into the curriculum. It would go against good practice and knowledge of what is acceptable and good for children. In a way, the curriculum is trying to take those parents back to something that is truer to their culture.

*JS: Have any conflicts arisen with, for example, Maori people who said 'You may not like it, but this is a normal cultural practice for us, it ought to be in the curriculum. We want it in'.*

JM: Well, the Maori culture doesn't include much that people would see as objectionable in terms of childrearing practices. I'm not saying there are no negative practices: I don't have sufficient knowledge of the culture. What I'm saying is that none came through strongly when the curriculum was being developed. One that might be interpreted as a negative practice generally is that, on the forecourt of the Marae (the traditional meeting area), women are not allowed to

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... the idea of the curriculum is  
that it serves as a model for how to work with people  
from a range of different cultures.

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speak during the welcoming ceremony. The Dean of our school is a woman and there are all sorts of functions that happen on the Marae where she cannot speak, although she is a person with the authority. Now, for many people who are not Maori that's quite difficult to accept, particularly in terms of women's rights and the women's movement. But it is part of Maori culture and, when we're on their ground, we do what they do. We respect their culture.

There are two Maori points of view on this. Some Maori women say that's okay, we have the power in other ways; others say they ought to be allowed to speak. It also depends on which area you come from, because in one or two areas the women are allowed to speak. What some see as negative, the majority considers acceptable practice.

*PNP: These sorts of questions arise a lot in Southern Africa as well. Women are either not allowed or not encouraged to speak in public. But that does not necessarily mean that they have no authority. They have power in many other ways. This is a culture of verbalising authority, in a way. If one speaks, one shows authority. These women don't see*

*it that way. Because quite a lot of them really have a lot of control on society, on families, on clans and so on, despite the fact that they don't speak in public. It's not a straightforward issue. But what is the Maori view of the dominant culture, of assimilation, integration, and so on?*

JM: New Zealand is no longer on an assimilation road. Visitors to New Zealand find it very difficult to accept that Maori have set up their own early childhood services, their own schools and so on: they say it's apartheid. But it's not: Maori have chosen to do so on the basis of their needs.

I've changed my views too: if this is the way to maintain Maori language and culture, then it's the way to go forward. There are things that Maori feel very strongly about. For example, they have not had access to some things and so naturally they question the nature of partnership. But we now have our first Maori and non-Maori coalition government; and there's also more emphasis on Maori empowerment. There are lots of things happening now that indicate that there were injustices or inadequacies and that these should be righted.

*PNP: Sometimes groups that have been marginalised and really suppressed for a long time need to have their own separate development. In New Zealand, in terms of division of resources and access to subsidies, if such groups choose for separate development, is that subsidised equally?*

JM: Definitely. Sometimes it's subsidised more generously, in recognition of the inequities of the past. This separate development issue is a very difficult one. At the moment in our university there are very positive developments, and some are separate while a lot are cooperative. I would once have said that they should all be cooperative, but that fits more into an assimilation model. I believe that we are at a time in our history when some separate developments are necessary. What may then happen is that people are empowered, both in their culture and in their confidence in their culture. My dream is that in the future there will be a merging together, with each being strong in its own beliefs and culture.

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## Supporting implementation

Implementing a curriculum demands wide support. It can be successful. The same sorts of mechanisms can be applied in New Zealand.

- the Ministry of Education has provided a set of guidelines, broad but of different strands of curriculum, and resources that include information and material;
- a research centre for early childhood development and implementation has been devised and implemented;
- the Early Childhood Professional Support Team at the University of Waikato has developed behavioural research and training to help people understand the philosophical basis of the curriculum, and to help them match the strands of the curriculum with their



# Mexico:

## *Educational experiences with women and girl children in rural, indigenous communities*

Martha Patricia Pimentel Garcia

*This article is adapted from a presentation made by the author at the 'Segundo Congreso de educación infantil familiar' (Second congress of child education in the family), Lugo, Spain in September 1997.*

*It discusses the 'Citlalmina' Programme that is supported by the Foundation and operated in the State of Oaxaca in Mexico, by the 'Unidad de Capacitación e Investigación Educativa para la Participación' (UCIEP - Organisation for Training and Research for Participation).*

*Martha Patricia Pimentel Garcia is Director General of UCIEP.*

The 'Unidad de Capacitación e Investigación Educativa para la Participación' (UCIEP - Organisation for Training and Research for Participation) is a non governmental organisation (NGO). It was founded in 1987 with the general objectives of helping to bring about improvements in the living conditions of people living in poverty - especially rural, indigenous populations - and to promote and defend their economic, social, cultural, political and civil rights. It specifically aims to

develop and support processes of self-determination in directing educational practice and social analysis; and to enable a problem-solving approach to what is revealed by that social analysis.

UCIEP's accumulated experiences have led us to identify education, community development and research as key areas. We have also decided to focus on women and children because they have been regarded traditionally as inferior, and have had few opportunities to contribute to the social life of our country.

**The need for action**  
There are ample facts and figures to demonstrate the vulnerability of indigenous Mexican children. The 1995 census revealed that a total of 10 million people are members of the 56 different indigenous groups of Mexico; that most of the 14 million Mexicans

who live below the extreme poverty line live in rural areas; and that the largest number of these people are indigenous.

In 1996, in one of the richest states of Mexico, the number of children who died because of illnesses and conditions that are associated with poverty increased by 30 per cent compared to the previous year. In July 1997, a national survey showed that 16 per cent of rural children were severely malnourished, while about 56 per cent were considered small for their age. All of this reflects the fact that rural families have the equivalent of just four USD per week to feed each family member.

The picture is similarly bleak in education. Statistics show that just over three million Mexican children attend pre-schools - less than 50 per cent of



Mother and child, Oaxaca State (Mexico)  
photo: Fernando Viveros  
(an entry for the Poster Competition)

the total; and that it is mostly urban children who attend school and they do so on average for seven years. Rural children, by comparison attend on average for only three; more than two million rural children never attend primary school at all; and there is a 20 per cent drop-out rate among those who do.

#### UCIEP's starting points

For six years, UCIEP has been running a programme in six communities in the state of Mexico. This promotes the economic, legal and social organisation of women, by creating groups and training them using non-formal educational theories and methods. The work is based on gender: we start from the ways in which the anatomical differences that characterise each gender have been used socially – for example, to justify inequalities in how each is treated or valued.

As far as women are concerned, this especially means the limits that are placed on their development and on their autonomy.

The process involves raising the awareness of women, enhancing their

organisational abilities and focusing on their rights. This enables them to create and sustain productive and social projects to improve the quality of their lives and strengthen their position and involvement in their communities. At the same time, we encourage and support the development of educational and development resources for their children.

Over the past six years, uciep and local women have formed and sustained six 'Sociedades de Solidaridad Social' (SSS – Social Solidarity Groups). These have very clear objectives, including: to create sources of employment; to promote the social well-being of the members and their families; and to ensure that they have the basic necessities of life. Each SSS maintains a range of initiatives that may include: a community shop; a community pharmacy; a craft workshop; a cookhouse; a housing project; a childcare centre; and work for the rights of women and children.

#### Adapting to a new context

In 1994, UCIEP carried out research into the human rights of indigenous children in the state of Oaxaca and the

results caused the communities to demand action. In response, UCIEP offered to make use of its experiences in the state of Mexico, adapting them to the cultural contexts of Oaxaca. By way of entry, we offered a participatory programme that included early education, pre-school facilities and the promotion of the rights of the child.

Eight mixed communities were chosen. In contrast to the state of Mexico, most people in these communities use their indigenous language, and almost all of the women are monolingual. In addition, there has been a great deal of migration, either to the USA or to the big farms in the north of the country. This means that one or both parents are absent for long periods. There is also a strong military presence in the area, mostly because of armed conflict, and the appearance of the Ejército Popular Revolucionario (EPR – Revolutionary Popular Army). Factors like these all have an impact on the cultural dynamic.

However, despite differences we believe that the problems of the mothers and children of both zones are very similar. They include: malnutrition;

illiteracy; domestic violence; discrimination; difficulty in accessing or completing basic education; absence of work; absence of tools and materials for production; and the inadequacies of health, water, electricity, communications, drainage and other services.

#### Programmes and sub-programmes

The chosen communities are characterised by very high marginalisation; while migration has had specific effects on cultural composition. These include: communities in which the majority is female – girls, mothers and grandmothers; families headed by mothers, grandparents or aunts and uncles; and families in which males over 13 live far apart from the females. Family survival demands that each member of the family must work, inside or outside the community; and there is a high school drop out rate among girls, because they must take on domestic work or work in the fields. We believe that only a wide-scale, integrated approach would have any effect in these circumstances, and have therefore launched two programmes and three sub-programmes.

The first programme is called 'Citlalmina'. It is built around the idea of community organisation and development, through organised participation of women and girls. Within this programme, are the three sub-programmes:

- 1 Women and sustainable development;
- 2 Education and early childhood development; and
- 3 Development and the participation of children (0-18).

Each of these – in coordination with the others – develops a body of work that aims at self-development in people, and sustainable development in their communities.

The second programme is made up of socio-educational research to give UCIEP's actions a sound theoretical and methodological base.

#### Key concepts

The 'Citlalmina' programme is about progressive structural change brought about by specific approaches to non-formal education. One such approach is built around an emphasis on the ways

in which women assemble their identity, and on the mechanisms that bring about their subordination.

Another is based on our own interpretation of the concept of popular education. While Latin America has had vast experience in popular education, its conceptualisation has not always been clear. For example, sometimes it means the formal education of adults to bring about consciousness-raising, understanding of illiteracy, basic education, training for work, and community development.

However, in UCIEP, we have a holistic vision that acknowledges the multiple processes involved, the ordering of these, and their organisational, economic and political nature. And we also link adult education with infant education and development, taking into account how adults and children build up their knowledge. We approach learning from the constructivist perspective, trying to develop a practical education that starts from the socio-cultural context of the communities. The objective is to ensure comprehension of more universal realities so that people can develop



Ready for anything (Mexico)  
photo: Marc Matahero

themselves to the maximum possible: people need to understand what education and infant development necessarily imply; and to comprehend both the environment in which they live, and the interactive network of which they form part.

#### The practice

We have developed a method of promotion, organisation and action-research that starts from the participation of adults.

In practical terms, this means promoting the participation of all those who directly influence the development of young children – parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, siblings, teachers.

This work is done in small groups, and the tasks of the participants include considering whether the social conditions of the community offer the optimal conditions for the development of their children. If they do not, then it is the members of the community who must decide what more is required, and find ways to provide this.

So far, results have included providing daycare centres for children between

three months and six years, offering early education, pre-school education, and health and nutrition services. These centres contain areas for the smallest babies, for those who are still breastfeeding, for pre-schoolers, for adult learning, for eating, and for medical consultations using traditional treatment and medicines. Education of the children is by the mothers of the women's organisations. These people are fully trained and are monitored permanently. Parallel with the work in the centres, a sub programme about children's rights has been developed. This involves children and young people from 2 to 18.

#### Model curricula

UCIEP developed a model curriculum in the state of Mexico that linked the education of adults with that of children, and has a cognitive orientation. Learning makes sense to the participants because it is constructive and purposive. It also includes learning how to operate productive workshops for the parents whose children attend the centres.

In the state of Oaxaca, we are now echoing this by constructing a model curriculum that we call 'Comunidad, niñez y familia indígena' (COMUNIFAM – Community, Childhood and the Indigenous Family). This

model is very similar to that of the state of Mexico, but there are differences. One is that much of the work is carried out in homes rather than in centres; a second is linked to the fact that most of the communities in Oaxaca have less than a thousand inhabitants, have a higher percentage of indigenous people who are also illiterate and monolingual, and have their own cultural rules.

To accommodate these, a different methodology has been developed. This has 12 steps to give a cultural diagnosis of the community that allows us a profound understanding of cultural practices in: childhood; the exploitation, use and conservation of natural resources; norms and customs in social, political, justice and economic organisation; the revaluation of language and traditions that allow the preservation of cultural identity; and the identification of the basic needs of the families and community. The construction of a model curriculum for early and pre-school education is based on these data.

#### Objectives and operations

In essence, the 'Citlalmina' project works towards:

- 1 Women's self-development, and development of the families;





'Girl from Chayuco' (Mexico)  
photo: Fernando Viveros  
(an entry for the Poster Competition)

the development of their children as much as is possible.

The operation of the programme is based on the following:

- Selection by the community of three community educators;
- Establishment by the community of a training and learning centre in which activities for children, young people and women can develop;
- Formation of sss, in line with the cultures found in the community;
- Home visiting;
- Formation of community education committees that draw on self-determination activities.

As with the model from the state of Mexico, the training of educational agents – who we now call community educators – is the core of the project.

Our focus is on basic learning needs and the skills necessary to fulfil them. We call these the essential tools; and they include calculation, reading and writing, problem-solving, self-expression, and so on. To them we add the theoretical/practical content – for example, the values and attitudes

necessary for people to interact with their environments. The essential tools are matched to the specific demands of individuals, helping them to become more competent in their daily lives, and in their work as educational agents. By matching essential tools to the needs of individuals, a series of personal competencies can be defined that, according to Sylvia Schmelkes:

*'imply and embrace in each case, at least four components. These components centre on: information and knowledge (appropriation, processing and use of information); ability; attitude; and value.'*\*

From needs to educational content

The basic learning needs are translated into educational content via a process of selection from local and universal cultures (including child raising practices), and from basic education and pre-school curricula. This has produced a group of six key areas to prepare families, communities and educators for their roles:

- 1 Organisation and functioning of education services (daycare centres, sss, learning/teaching centres);

- 2 Basic necessities of the communities;
- 3 Family life and work;
- 4 Local culture (economic system, parties, traditions, and so on);
- 5 National culture;
- 6 Holistic development of children (health, nutrition, level of learning, their rights, problems that affect them, and so on).

Most of the people who participate are illiterate so the project encourages the development of literacy and numeracy; while the general approach is to generate themes from these key areas and explore them using problem-solving techniques.

Overall, the educational experiences that the women and children participate in are articulated by the problems that they share, and by their need to overcome the obstacles that prevent them from having a better quality of life.

\* Schmelkes S (1991) *Necesidades Básicas de Aprendizaje de los Adultos en América Latina*; Regional Office of UNESCO Latin America and the Caribbean, Mexico, p 33.

- 2 Sustainable community development;
- 3 Conditions within families and communities that facilitate the holistic development of girl children;
- 4 Stimulation of role modelling by parents for infants;
- 5 Development of parenting abilities in parents so that they can support

The author is a social and child psychologist who has served as Venezuela's Council of Directors for the Coordination of Social Programming for Childhood at the Ministry of the Family. He is currently the country's National Director of Pre-School Education, which puts him in a strong position to ensure that early years provision is both extended and strengthened in Venezuela. His career includes 11 years of teaching child and language development to pre-school and primary teacher students at the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello and the Universidad Metropolitana in Caracas. He has an extensive background in research in many areas associated with early childhood and has published widely, especially about children who are excluded from formal schools, and about Venezuela's community-based day care centres.

# Venezuela

## developing inter-sectorial networks

Jesús Leonardo Yáñez

*'En un lugar de la Mancha, de cuyo nombre no quisiera acordarme...'* (in a place in La Mancha, the name of which I do not wish to remember...)<sup>1</sup>

Government officials and employees often compare themselves to Cervantes' Don Quixote, the opening line from which I quote above. They believe that they have stubbornly fought to make a better world for others, but that the beneficiaries of their efforts do not appreciate the gift they have been given. In the end, they may come to feel that they have been fighting imaginary monsters.

Experienced teachers – including pre-school teachers in centres – are an example: they are prone to argue that, despite their huge efforts to make children and parents understand the importance of education, their targets resist such 'good' ideas and behave just as they have always done. In my view, such teachers waste their lives fighting monsters created by their own minds and, like Don Quixote, can end up being whisked aloft on one of the sails of a windmill while still battling. And all

because they have mistakenly identified something benign and useful – the windmill – as a monster that must be fought.

I am not saying that the injustices identified by the teachers are not real, nor that they should be ignored in the battle to improve the quality of education. But the targeted beneficiaries of their efforts must also have the chance to come to the table, to contribute their ideas, to have them discussed, and to help find solutions. Instead, what often happens is that educational planners put together weak or inadequate projects with the sole aim of increasing the coverage of early childhood education. Meanwhile their supposed beneficiaries are creating real solutions to the problems that they have in meeting the development and care needs of young children. And they do so by making the best use of the resources that exist around them, and of the solidarity that community networks generate and sustain.

Access to pre-school education is a problem in Venezuela. More than 80 per

cent of the population lives in poverty; and more than half is extremely poor. The population is also young and the poor have the youngest average age. Not only that but many of the parents of the youngest children are too poor and inexperienced to take advantage of the scarce resources that do exist in their communities.

To complicate the picture, many politicians do not understand why it makes sense to invest in the education of children under six years. They do not seem to grasp the advantages that accrue through early childhood education and so every year the budget is reduced.

I hope the above helps to explain why so many teachers end up disappointed and deceived, and retire dispirited and tired of teaching or any related activity.

### More rewarding battles

Fortunately, this is not always the case. About 10 years ago, a retired teacher<sup>2</sup> initiated an alternative project for children under seven and their families. Her aim

was to make the best possible use of her experience as a teacher by working in the 'Centros del Niño y la Familia' (CNF – Child and family centres) programme, to improve its impact on living conditions.

She brought together educators and others with an interest in children and their families, creating a complex network of people and institutions that took a broad developmental view of what could be done. The point was to identify, mobilise and coordinate all resources that could usefully contribute to improvement. With the help of international organisations (including the Bernard van Leer Foundation), local governors and commercial enterprises, the project developed a number of social programmes. These included credit schemes for small businesses, funding for remodelling the infrastructure of schools and houses, and – most important of all – continuous in-service training for teachers and community promoters. The project was called PACOMIN, and it has now expanded to cover 11 communities in the state of Falcón. It has also developed its network so well that it is able to bring about real



(Venezuela) 'PACOMIN' project (an entry for the Poster Competition)

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*They have uncovered and unleashed the potential of communities ...*

”

changes in communities, and therefore to have a deep influence on the lives of children and families.

Some years later, another teacher started a programme in the state of Anzoategui with the participation of local oil enterprises and the support of the Foundation. This project, known as FUNDASILETAS, has grown to cover five municipalities and includes programmes that mobilise teenagers and grandparents to support children as they grow, and to enhance their development environment.

Today, there are many success stories like this around the country, and each is having a positive impact on patterns of childrearing and development, and on life opportunities for parents and communities.

#### **The heart of the battle**

Since 1992, a project supported by the Ministry of Education and the Foundation, 'Infancia, familia y pobreza' (Childhood, Family and Poverty), has been at the centre of this expanding web, under the optimistic leadership of many teachers and former teachers. These are certainly not Don

Quixotes, but professionals who listen to the people they serve. This project can be seen as the beginning of an admission that Venezuela was operating a two-tier system: one tier for those who participated in formal provisions and who were certified as having attended pre-schooling; and one for those in non-conventional programmes and who were not certified because their programmes were not officially recognised.

The inevitable outcome is that, despite the enormous efforts that have been made to increase the number of children who are adequately served at pre-school level, the number of children who are officially recognised stays the same: the figures don't reflect the reality. Other consequences are also apparent. For example:

- 1 Children in non-conventional pre-school provisions have been considered to be in transition into 'real' pre-schools – the formal ones;
- 2 Non-conventional curricula have not been considered the equal of formal ones – and they have also been seen as specifically for poorer children;

- 3 Teachers and other staff in non-formal programmes segregate themselves from those in formal programmes because the two sides have fewer and fewer elements in common – and this remained true even when non-formal programmes used conventional infrastructures and formal techniques;
- 4 Universities trained teachers for conventional pre-schools, and there were no training policies for working in pre-school programmes that focus on the family and the community. That made it hard to find appropriate staff for the non-formal pre-schools.

#### **Victories**

Despite such structural impediments, these projects have achieved a great deal. They have, for example, been able to generate their own resources independently of central government, by encouraging local government and private businesses to invest in community development. In general, they have had the following effects.

- 1 They have provided articulation between the various social support

programmes that promote the development of the family and community. These programmes include health programmes, the development of small businesses, family food programmes and environmental improvement programmes.

- 2 They have increased coverage by allowing children who cannot get to formal pre-schools to benefit from the operation of non-formal pre-schools.
- 3 They have uncovered and unleashed the potential of communities to function well in the interests of their children's development. This has also given families control over institutional resources, and the means to establish alliances with business partners and neighbours.
- 4 They have strengthened the idea of the family as the central institution in the development of young children.

They have also had other important influences. For example:



“

*The key to that success lies in operating through and with local support networks*

”

- 1 exchanges of experiences between the 'Infancia, familia y pobreza' project and other entities in the country have allowed the development of other models of networks for the care of children.
- 2 Researchers and research centres are developing an interest in problem-solving, and investigation and discovery approaches in early education. This is because the Ministry of Education has adopted such models as public policy, and is also strengthening them in training programmes.
- 3 Training curricula for teachers have been revised to incorporate some elements of the non-conventional programmes.
- 4 Strong pressure has been applied to the planning levels of the Ministry of Education to contextualise pre-school curricula, bring traditional and non-conventional strategies together, and reform aspects of the Education Law.
- 5 Local initiatives have been validated and have been added to the range of

options available to ensure pre-school education.

The biggest success of projects such as PACOMIN and FUNDAISLETAS, however, is in integrating education with early childhood, the family and the community. The key to that success lies in operating through and with local support networks, and in making a comprehensive, integrated and effective use of the resources that are found in the formal education system, the family and the community. This is why I claim that these projects have indeed found viable alternatives to formal approaches, thus helping the country to comply with its commitment to holistic education for children aged 0 to 6 years.

#### **Remaining conflicts**

That doesn't mean to say that problems don't remain. The reconceptualisation discussed above causes tensions between specialists – including teachers in pre-school centres – and other actors. There are three areas in which differences of opinion commonly arise: *quality in the curricula; changes in working conditions in the formal sector; and the relationship between the community and the formal sector.*

In terms of *quality in the curriculum*, several apparent problem areas can be readily dismissed. For example, it is claimed that accepting a non-conventional model denies young children good quality education. Yet we can now see that this does not have to be true: the experiences of PACOMIN and FUNDAISLETAS – among others – show that quality actually improves when parents and community members participate in the education of their children.

It is also claimed that trained teachers are substituted by untrained childcarers and that the careers of teachers are therefore threatened. However, there is no such substitution. What happens is that teachers take on additional roles – for example, they become professional trainers as the childcarers learn about early childhood care and development.

In terms of *changes in working conditions* and contracts, many teachers are frightened to leave the security of their schools. However, those that do venture out find ample compensation, not least because the alliance between themselves, the parents and community members guarantees that the children

are looked after wherever they happen to be. In addition, the presence of the teachers in the communities helps them to avoid being regarded as strangers or outsiders. This adds to their sense of personal security.

Some teachers also worry that having to work with others, outside of their centres, will cause them extra work. The reality is that the participation of parents and community members simply changes the nature of some of their work. However, many teachers have not been prepared for this. Once they make the necessary adjustments, they discover that the work is shared, and that the people with whom they share it quickly prove to be indispensable.

Teachers also fear having their territory invaded by parents, community representatives, promoters, professionals from NGOs, and other people. But this is a matter of adapting, and of forming and managing alliances in ways that are appropriate to the local circumstances. A good example is that of the 'La Barraca' pre-school in the community of Coco. It includes all parents in its work, all the way from

initial planning right through to maintaining and repairing the buildings. Another example can be found in the 'Familia de Baruta' programme, which relies on community promoters to keep the pre-school work going while the teachers are on holidays.

In terms of the relationship between the formal sector and communities there are three misconceptions. The first is that school and community should be totally independent of each other – despite the fact that the children who attend the school also form part of the community. However, numerous investigations have shown that mutual understanding between families and schools produce better results in terms of the socio-emotional development, the inculcation of values and the development of cultural identity.

The second misconception is that the family is the party that learns and the school is the party that teaches. This has been passed down to us from the days of didactic teaching. But today it is recognised that it is preferable to

be knowledgeable rather than over-educated; and that knowledge gained in school is neither more nor less valid than knowledge gained in the family and the community. My view is that, if we want a favourable change in education, we have to promote learning encounters between schools and families. The idea that you can only learn in school is obsolete, as is the idea that there is no necessary link between what you learn and how you live.

The third misconception that is often raised about the relationship between schools and communities is a double one: that non-conventional programmes are for the poor, and are necessarily linked to community development; and that formal educational initiatives are therefore not one of the driving forces behind community development. For me, choosing to use non-conventional programmes in the most vulnerable areas, and working to integrate them with all other supportive elements, is a strategic decision in favour of the development of a country. To see such programmes as only for the poor is to fail to understand this

strategy: any educational proposal that aims to improve the quality of life – and that is what non-conventional programmes do – is a proposal for quality education.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to put forward my understanding of the word 'quality'. For me, it is not some fixed and unchangeable concept but rather an ideal constructed from the collective aspirations of the beneficiaries, the goals of their leaders and directors, and the theoretical and philosophical evaluations of the curricula that academics and researchers must do.

#### notes

1. *Don Quixote* is the hero of a Spanish novel by Cervantes. One of his adventures includes battling in a confused state against what he believes to be a fearsome monster. It is actually a windmill with its huge sails in motion.

2. Many teachers retire in their forties in Venezuela.

(Venezuela) PACOMIN project



## Kushanda Pre-school Programme: winner of the 1997 Oscar van Leer Award



The winner of the 1997 Oscar van Leer Award is the 'Kushanda Pre-school Programme' Zimbabwe. The award is presented annually in memory of Oscar van Leer, the son of the founder of the Foundation, who died in 1996. It is given to a Foundation-supported project that has made an important contribution towards enabling parents and communities to help young children realise their innate potential. In the case of the Kushanda Pre-school Programme, the Award particularly recognises the project's emphasis on community ownership, empowering disadvantaged or less privileged people, and keeping costs low by

helping to identify and utilise the human and material resources that are available to communities.

An outline of some of the work of the Kushanda Pre-school Programme can be found in *Newsletter 86*, July 1997; and in *We are your children*, ECD Practice and Reflection series, no. 7. Copies are available from the Department of Programme Documentation and Communication.

photo: Ivar Samren (right) Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Foundation, presents the 1997 Oscar van Leer Award to John Conradie (left), Martin D Chapwanya and Emily Muzawasi of the Kushanda Pre-school Programme

New publication from the Foundation:

## *Samenspel - Mothers Speaking*

*Most publications describe the work of an early childhood project or organisation from the point of view of the project/organisation itself. But what do mothers think of the work of a project? Do they feel that their needs and those of their children are being met? Do they find the work useful, or even necessary? And what if their cultural and religious backgrounds are completely different from those of the project and the environment in which they live?*

The Foundation recently published the latest paper in its series 'Working Papers in Early Childhood Development'. Entitled *Samenspel - Mothers Speaking*, it records the views of the mothers with whom the Samenspel project works, and the approach of the project itself. Based in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, Samenspel works with migrant families, many of whom originate from Turkey, Morocco or the Caribbean. Samenspel's approach - which places children and their parents, and those who work directly with them, at the centre of its work - is effective, flexible and rooted in reality. As a result, it has been adopted by many organisations all over the Netherlands.

The paper shows that mothers learn a great deal from playgroups, and try to apply this knowledge in their daily lives and in the rearing of their children. It is useful to people and organisations working with children, and local and national governments; and can provide a foundation for those wanting to establish and support playgroups for specific groups.

*Samenspel - Mothers Speaking* by Nanette Kieneker and Judith Maas on behalf of Samenspel op Maat. Working Paper in Early Childhood Development number 21, September 1997, ISBN 90-6193-047-3. Single copies are available free of charge from the Foundation at the address inside the front cover.

Joanna Bouma, Series Editor  
*Working Papers in Early Childhood Development*

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## About the Bernard van Leer Foundation

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private foundation based in the Netherlands. It operates internationally, concentrating its resources on early childhood development.

The Foundation's income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer (1883-1958), a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist who, in 1919, founded an industrial and consumer packaging company that was to become Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer NV. This is currently a limited company operating in over 40 countries world wide.

During his lifetime Bernard van Leer supported a broad range of humanitarian causes. In 1949, he created the Bernard van Leer Foundation, to channel the revenues from his fortune to charitable purposes after his death. When he died in 1958, the Foundation became the beneficiary of the entire share capital of the then privately owned Van Leer enterprise and other assets. Under the leadership of his son Oscar van Leer, who died in 1996, the Foundation focused on enhancing opportunities for children growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage to optimally develop their innate potential.

In seeking to achieve this objective, the Foundation has chosen to concentrate on children from zero to seven years of age. This is because scientific findings have demonstrated that interventions in the early years of childhood are most effective in yielding lasting benefits to children and society.

The Foundation accomplishes its objective through two interconnected strategies:

- 1 An international grant-making programme in selected countries aimed at developing contextually appropriate approaches to early childhood care and development; and
- 2 The sharing of knowledge and know-how in the domain of early childhood development that primarily draws on the experiences generated by the projects that the Foundation supports, with the aim of informing and influencing policy and practice.

A leaflet giving fuller details of the Foundation and its grant-making policy is available, as is a Publications and Videos List. Please contact the Department of Documentation and Communication, at the address given inside the front cover.

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'Father helps his son put on his jacket' (the Netherlands)  
photo courtesy of the 'Samenspel' Project (an entry for the Poster Competition)



# *The 1997 poster competition*

Bernard van Leer Foundation

*Early Childhood Matters!*

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# Early Childhood Matters

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*Culturally appropriate approaches in  
Trinidad and Tobago: violent parenting violent children  
Young children in complex environments  
Guatemala: working with the Mayan A'chi people  
A culturally oriented approach to early childhood development  
Building on a legacy of research  
The limits of human influence  
A Turkish father in the Netherlands*

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PO Box 82334, 2508 EH

The Hague, the Netherlands

Tel. + 31 (0) 70 361 2040, Fax + 31 (0) 70 361 2171

email: registry, bvl@nl

Editor

Jim Smale

Editorial Advisors

Lucienne Collaghan, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Design & Production

Hennrich, 1000, The Netherlands

The Hague, the Netherlands

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# Culturally appropriate approaches in ECD

*This edition of Early Childhood Matters presents a variety of perspectives and insights into an area that is of interest to many people in the field of early childhood – culturally appropriate approaches to development work with young children, their families and their communities. The range of contributors is wide: from a Turkish father building a life with his family in a new country, to an applied anthropologist who has advised the Israeli Government on the absorption of immigrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia; from practitioners in a variety of early childhood projects, to the President of the First Nations Institute.*

The views that are expressed are also wide and diverse, and incompatibilities between them are evident. But together, they produce an outline for a map of an extensive and complex area: each article identifies and explores a number of reference points; and also charts the existence of others that need to be examined.

Why are culturally appropriate approaches of such interest? For the Foundation, the main reason is that culture determines the nature of many elements of young children's development environments. When that is accepted and understood, the need is to recognise the importance of cultural conceptualisations of childhood, and of the child development theories and practices that follow on from these in any given culture. The articles in this

edition start from this platform and explore ways in which culture affects the day to day lives of many children. The most interesting examples of this come from contexts in which interactions between cultures are highlighting differences, revealing needs, uncovering problems, throwing up concerns, offering alternatives, and signalling the need for changes in attitudes, approaches, methodologies and service provision. Overall, exploration of these sorts of areas helps to determine what are the most appropriate ways of supporting young children.

## **Working in context**

The contexts that are featured in this edition of *Early Childhood Matters* include parts of the world in which displaced persons are trying to rebuild a

sense of who they are and where they belong; countries that host migrant workers and their families; a country that is welcoming entire cultural groups; countries in which indigenous people strive for recognition by the dominant culture; and regions in which cultural or ethnic groups are reaffirming their traditional practices and customs, and offering them as legitimate alternatives.

A bias is evident here, a bias in favour of those who find themselves marginalised partly because their cultures are not sufficiently understood and respected, and who therefore do not enjoy the rights, opportunities, and services that they are entitled to. However, that does not mean that all aspects of any culture can necessarily be defended: some elements in cultures damage young children or severely restrict their opportunities for healthy development.

The article by Father Gerald Pantin provides a perfect example of this. It describes and discusses an everyday culture of violence that adversely affects young children, not just in the physical

sense, but also in the sense of damaging key elements of their childhood. It is a cycle because people who have experienced violence as children may practice violence on their own children in turn. He draws on his observations and experiences in Trinidad and Tobago, but his article will highlight many parallels and produce echoes elsewhere. (page 6)

## **Culture, context and the needs of young children**

Each of the articles in this edition considers perceived needs that are revealed by interactions between cultures. Some of these are broad, covering for example, the general need to rescue and revalidate threatened cultures. Others are specific and include the need for young children to feel certain of who they are; the need to validate traditional childcare practices and keep them living and dynamic; the need for a culturally relevant development environment to be established no matter what the local circumstances happen to be; and a need for young children to operate confidently as members of culturally mixed societies.





Photo courtesy of Ntataise project, South Africa

Kirk Felsman reflects on his experiences among displaced children in Africa who, through war and conflict, find themselves in centres instead of their family homes, cut off from their natural surroundings, remote from their familiar cultures and separated – often permanently – from their principal caregivers. His article discusses many of the practical difficulties that can easily result in the development needs of children being neglected altogether, or being met in culturally inappropriate ways. To help bring something of value into their lives, he shows that low-cost/no-cost resources can be developed to enable children to be what they naturally are: active agents in their own development. He also discusses the complexities of identifying, reaching and mobilising those people from the children's own cultures who can and should provide support. (page 11)

#### **Exclusion, denial and confrontation**

For young children, integration can result in exclusion of them, their families and communities from services and processes; denial of their right to be brought up within their cultures; and confrontation with children from other cultural or ethnic groups. A number of concerns go hand in hand with these: the loss of children's cultural identity as their culture is assimilated by a more powerful culture or prejudiced by outside influences; the replacement of cultural practices in child care by those that don't necessarily have greater validity or practical value; and the crippling of young children's self-esteem by stereotyping and racial scripting.

Claudio Tzay finds many of these elements and factors in his work with people of the Mayan-Ixil culture in Guatemala. Cultural marginalisation on this scale demands a comprehensive project that tackles everything from rescuing and preserving the culture, through to ensuring that Mayan-Ixil children can be properly integrated into a formal primary school system that has to be changed in the process. Underlying the work itself is a commitment to interculturalism, something that it is tempting to connect with a key element in the Mayan-Ixil culture: that there must be balanced participation between men and women. 'Nothing good can come out of any decision that lacks one or the other'. The commitment to interculturalism leads to inevitable frustrations and delays: progress is slow. But, as the article shows, problems are taken as a series of obstacles that have to be overcome by steady determination over a long period. (page 18)

#### **Planning, organisation ... and attitudes**

In a wide ranging exploration of a massive Israeli settlement programme for Jews from Russia and Central Asia, Chen Bram identifies the need for changes right across the range: within the rationale; the approaches; the methodologies; and the support systems of programmes. As an anthropologist, he keeps a close eye on the particularity of intercultural relationships, exploring the complexities of the relationships between members of cultural groups and those of a different culture who work with them. He identifies the need to change the positions and

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*Central to all articles is the need to acknowledge and respect difference*

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attitudes of all those who have responsibility for programmes, and within them; and offers concrete examples that include recognising and respecting difference within seemingly heterogeneous groups, and bringing personal attitudes in line with professional attitudes. Lessons like these, although learned and applied in a particular context, will also suggest the need for changes in other settings. (page 23)

#### **Changes: different levels, different scales**

Most of the articles offer ideas about the need for significant changes. These include: changes in the ways in which children from different cultural groups learn to perceive and understand each other; improvements in the ways in which support and service provisions are made ready to receive children from minority groups; inclusive programmes of work; and a greater understanding of difference within cultural groups on the part of those who work with them.

Lucienne Callaghan argues for more than this in South Africa. She sees the need for broad general changes to lay the foundations for a range of more specific changes. After examining the ways in which 'Western' or 'Eurocentric' models of childcare have been developed in South Africa, she concludes that these approaches simply did not deliver to most children. She therefore calls for a radical reformation of childcare provision. This would build on an 'African' worldview that includes validating many

traditional approaches and practices. She goes into the problems that would accompany such a shift; and draws out specific parameters for programmes. These include transferring ownership to parents and community members, and setting such programmes within wider development initiatives. (page 30)

#### **Celebrating difference**

Central to all articles is the need to acknowledge and respect difference. The kinds of difference that are highlighted involve the conceptualisation of some aspects of childhood – even of childhood itself. Differences are also obvious in the values that inform and guide the nurturing of children; the roles of children in their families and communities; the roles that family and community members play in the care and education of young children; and the nature of the activities that are considered appropriate to support their development.

As a member of the Cherokee Nation of North America, Rebecca Adamson, President of the First Nations Development Institute, celebrates difference while acknowledging similarities across cultures. Looking at indigenous groups in North America, Southern Africa and Australia, she finds that many traditional child nurturing practices are valid and viable, and stand comparison with any others. Indeed they can be seen as better founded and more defensible because they have their roots in well established belief systems that include values such as sharing, and strengthening individuals. They can also

seem more 'child friendly' than some of those in other cultures – why is it, for example, that when parents in some countries divorce, children are seen as possessions? Through explicit and implicit questions such as these, she invites sober reflection on many aspects of any culture that children grow within.

But she is a realist and recognises that cultures will not survive just because they have a long history and look after their children well. One fundamental change that she looks for is economic self-reliance, so that the necessary facilities to support the healthy growth of young children can be funded. This equals real sustainability, and real cultural determination and ownership. (page 34)

This edition of *Early Childhood Matters* offers a wide-ranging collection of experiences, observations, views and reflections, and I look forward to hearing your reactions: please send in any comments that you have. Please also contact me if you are interested in producing an article that explores other aspects of culturally appropriate approaches in early childhood development.

*Jim Smale*  
Editor

# Trinidad and Tobago:

## violent parenting, violent children

*Father Gerard Pantin is the founder of Service Volunteered for All (SERVOL) in Trinidad and Tobago. In this article – which was taken from an address delivered at a Regional Seminar for Adolescent Programme Co-ordinators of SERVOL – he discusses a particular culture: that of violence. But it is violence of a special sort: one that may underlie overtly violent behaviour. It starts in a contaminated womb; moves on through repression in early childhood; and is reinforced in formal education. It is a violence that may help to cause loneliness and alienation, thereby encouraging violent behaviour in adolescents. Drawing on many years of experience with young people, he demonstrates how, in his view, the very youngest children can be sucked into a cycle of violence that has afflicted their parents, and that can affect them throughout their lives. He goes on to give straightforward advice about how this can be avoided.*

### The lonely adolescent

One of the best kept secrets in our Caribbean society is that by the time a young man picks up a weapon to do violence to another human being, an incredible amount of violence has been visited on him by unenlightened or uncaring nurturing practices. But no one appears to be interested in these root causes.

Over the last twenty years, I have talked to hundreds of adolescents and older people and in most instances I hear the same story:

'I am so lonely, so empty – I need another'

'I seem to look for love in all the wrong places'

'No one pays attention to me, no one respects me, no one really considers me important'

'There is something wrong with me, with people, with the world; there is something missing in our life. What is it? How did it start?'

I am convinced that a great deal of the modern problems of loneliness, alienation, restless searching, and addiction come from the way we were brought up and treated. It is centred on our bodies, how they were treated and

how we were taught to treat them. Contrary to what many wise and holy people say about the importance of concentrating on tuning our soul, our spirit, to God, I am suggesting that it is even more important to begin with the body. We must make sure we get that straight or else we'll be confused for the rest of our lives. I will argue in this article, that what appears in the bodies of our infant children is created by the

Photo courtesy of SERVOI.



culture that surrounds us, and it in turn reproduces this culture.

I wish you could attend the self-awareness class which is the centre of the SERVIO Adolescent Development Programme and in which, over a period of 13 weeks, we guide our young people towards an answer to the vital question: 'Who am I?' Through a process of exhilarating dialogue, we arrive at the realisation that we have to begin our exploration from the very start, as a fertilised egg in our mothers' womb.

**The loneliness starts from the beginning**

At this early stage, I am confronted by a situation that will absorb my attention for the rest of my life: the problem of 'I' and the other. In the womb, the other is the placenta, but it is a beautifully harmonious relationship so that the sense of other is hardly perceived. About the sixth month in the womb, I slowly begin to perceive that the placenta is other. This gives rise to anxiety but this, in itself, is not bad, as it prepares me for the world where there are lots of other people. It all depends on whether the foetus, which is me, is experiencing this feeling in an



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*Birth is the first, prolonged, emotional shock  
that children receive and they never forget it*

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environment which is loving or hostile. Is my mother's blood clean and wholesome, or is it saturated with alcohol, nicotine, drugs or the AIDS virus?

#### **Birth**

This is the first, prolonged, emotional shock that children receive and they never forget it. Doctors and nurses, convinced that their duty is to protect me from infection, ignore my signals that I want to touch, smell and taste my mother's body, the only comforting familiar thing in this alien new world. They place me in the sterile atmosphere of a nursery where my pathetic cries are added to the chorus of other newborn babies. We are inflicting terrible violence on newborn children, because we refuse to listen to them.

During the next three years children gradually become aware of themselves as separate. Their mother's face acts as a mirror and their development during those first three years is closely tied to the way their minds perceive their own bodies and how comfortable they are with their bodies. 'I am I' is another birth, but this takes three years instead of a few hours.

#### **The importance of touching, feeling, smelling, tasting**

Infants are curious, exploring people and use touch, feel, smell and taste much more than sight. But: how

- do we treat infants who
- pull down tablecloths
- eat grass and dirt
- play with their genitals?

We 'correct' them, slap them, tell them 'don't touch' and in so doing, we do an incredible amount of damage to them that may never be repaired. We are convinced that we know what is good for children; as a result, we very often end up by confusing them, making them unsure of themselves and suspicious and afraid of the world.

Over the last fifteen years I have asked more than 2,000 adolescents in my self-awareness classes: 'At what age should you discipline children?' The vast majority answer: 'From birth'. Children have to learn to wait; they cannot expect to be fed just because they are hungry, or cuddled just because they cry. By the time they have finished their Adolescent Parenting Programme, these adolescents have very different ideas but I weep for the tens of thousands who will continue the cycle of violence on their unsuspecting offspring.

Because it is violence. Whenever we ignore a baby crying, that is violence; whenever we stop children from exploring the world in which they live, that is violence; whenever we prevent a child from touching, that is violence. We are forcing them to suppress an urge within them at an age when they cannot understand why.

The Yequana Indians of Brazil make sure that their babies are in physical contact with the skin of another human being 24 hours a day for the first two years: These children grow up without that emptiness that

we modern people spend our lives trying to heal or cope with. A lot of our modern preoccupation with 'feeling good' through sex and drugs dates back to the fact that the way in which we were brought up didn't give us the opportunity of feeling good about our infant bodies.

The great physicist Albert Einstein was once asked: what is the most important question being asked by modern man? His reply: 'is the universe a friendly one?' Yequana children, because of close bodily contact, not only see the universe as friendly but feel it to be loving.

- A friendly universe gazes approvingly at the child.
  - A loving universe holds the child.
- That's where it all begins.

#### **Movement from feeling to seeing**

That moment when children look in a mirror and understand for the first time clearly and unequivocally that what they are seeing is what other people see when they look at them, is most important. That is when they realise:

'I belong to the world'

'I do not feel comfortable with the world.'

This is a movement from feeling to seeing and it is the heavy price children have to pay in order to belong to this world. Children are asked to give up their comfortable, trusting way of knowing the world (touching, smelling, tasting) and are forced into a sort of play-acting. 'Eat slowly!' 'Don't run so fast!' 'Don't

play in dirt!' 'Don't touch your private parts!' But the need to feel remains very strong in us. To know and to feel are closely connected: it is why children never learn from teachers they don't like, and why, if small children are not cuddled, they die.

The need to feel is why many children keep on holding on to transitional objects (teddy bears, old blankets and urine-soaked pillows) for comfort. We grow up needing them in order to get through difficult periods of our lives. It seems pretty harmless, until we start to use drugs and sex as transitional objects. It is only then that it dawns on us how broken and vulnerable we are.

#### **Violence in the schools**

If, as children, we are fortunate enough to be placed in an early childhood centre with a well trained carer, we get a temporary respite. Wonder of wonders, we are allowed to play, to touch, to dabble in paint and to thrust our hands into sand and water so that we begin to hope again. But before we know it, we are in primary school and have to sit quietly and listen as the teacher, who knows everything, proceeds to teach us, who are supposed to know nothing. As a result, something very precious, very beautiful, shrivels up inside us. The tiny voice in each child that continues to cry out despairingly 'I am beautiful! I am creative! I am gifted!' is ruthlessly silenced by this system.

For some there is a sense of achievement in being at the top of the class and getting into the school of their

choice. But the vast majority of children, particularly those who are gifted with their hands, are put down and their self-esteem is quietly but efficiently extinguished.

The violence continues in secondary school. Success in exams is the goal and teachers are judged by their ability to enable their pupils to succeed. Then we turn them out into society and tell them 'Forget the fact that we have violently suppressed practically every one of your inner urges from the time you were born; we expect you to be a caring, sharing, creative, compassionate adult member of your society.'

This accounts for much of the rage and pain we carry around that leads to crime, violence and war. Because, whatever we do, and however much TV and computers are the future of the world, the need to feel remains very strong in us.

#### **The remedy for this crisis**

On the basis of what we in SERVOL have been doing for over 25 years, I would like to propose a philosophical approach to the problem.

The first step is to accept the fact that all adult human beings are infected by a virus, that we in SERVOL have named 'cultural arrogance'. We discovered it in ourselves all those years ago and have since found out that it is very widespread. Those infected by this pernicious virus are convinced that because they come from a certain society, belong to a certain ethnic

Photo courtesy of SERVOL



group or have benefited from a certain type of education, they are superior to other people and in particular, the people they are trying to help. The result is that they almost never consult, or even listen to, the people who are supposed to benefit from their help. This leads them to overlook the obvious and to make a lot of very elementary mistakes.

SERVOL has discovered two vaccines that are very effective and easily affordable. The first is called 'attentive listening' and it means that before trying to help anyone we must listen to them for days, for months, for years; always convinced that what they

have to say about themselves is just as important as the brilliant insights and innovative solutions buzzing around in our busy little brains.

It is only when we have rid ourselves of most of our cultural arrogance that we are ready for the second vaccine, which we term 'respectful intervention'. If we feel called to interfere in the lives of other people, then let us do so respectfully, recognising that we are not experts and know-all and they are not ignoramuses and know-nothings, but that both parties can agree on a course of action in which they have both made a serious input.

#### **This philosophy applied to children and adolescents**

If we listened to the cries of newborn babies we would realise that their place is with their mothers. Mothers who were immigrants from Papua New Guinea to Australia, made such a fuss when the nurses tried to take their newborn babies from them that the authorities were forced to listen. Now all mothers who so desire go to sleep happily with their hand resting on the body of the child. Wonder of wonders, the children sleep peacefully.

If we listened to the body language of toddlers who tell us 'I have to touch, I have to explore, I have to taste' then perhaps we would not see them as wicked, disobedient children. We would offer them a safe environment in which they can crawl about and touch to their hearts' content.

If we listened to the need of primary school children to express themselves, to find out things for themselves with the guidance of teachers, we could begin to design our primary schools along the lines of the Colombian Escuelas Nuevas (New Schools). In these there is a strong bond between the community and the school, which allows children to learn at their own pace.

If only we listened to adolescents. 90 per cent of adolescents say that: 'no one ever really listens to me; parents say they are listening, teachers say they are listening but I know from their body language, from the way their eyes drift away, that they are only going through the motions and waiting patiently for me to stop so that they can tell me about their solution to my problem.'

That is why so many adolescents do things that are specifically designed to make parents notice them, like wearing outlandish (by adult standards!) clothes, by deliberately speaking in grunts and by inventing music that only adolescents understand and that literally has to be translated for adults.

#### **Conclusion**

I suggest that every programme must be built on a foundation of years of listening and that this listening must continue even when, or should I say especially when, you seem to have come up with a 'successful' project. This is particularly true for programmes that are designed to help parents and communities work

together for the development of adolescents who are capable of coping with the pressures of modern day society.

Up to the early sixties, there was a support system based on the nuclear family, the extended family and a society in which people generally agreed on what was good or bad, right or wrong. In such a situation, children were provided with a safety net to make up for the deficiencies of unenlightened parenting practices. Today's world is quite different and from an early age, children are being faced with stressful situations and with less support from family and societal structures. Because of this it is essential that parents and educational authorities work together to ensure that children emerge from school with a solid sense of their own identity and self-worth. This will enable them to cope with a universe that is becoming less friendly by the day.

This cannot be achieved by crash programmes in self-esteem for adolescents, by quick fix or bandage-it-up solutions, but by an awareness of the importance of the early years in the development of personality in small children. If we fail to do this, we can expect a steady increase in the level of violent behaviour exhibited by adolescents. Maybe it is their final, despairing way of pleading with the adult world:

'Would you please listen to us?'

○

# Young children in complex emergencies

Kirk Felsman

Kirk Felsman is a clinical child psychologist by training. In addition to his clinical work with children, adolescents and their families, he has done both research and programme implementation with displaced children in Latin America, Southeast Asia and Southern Africa. Currently, he teaches at the Sanford Institute of Public Policy at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, USA, where he is also Director of the Global Leadership and Service Initiative. He is married and the father of three, including an active pre-schooler.

*The war acquires comparatively little significance for children so long as it only threatens their lives, disturbs their comfort or cuts their food rations. It becomes enormously significant the moment it breaks up family life and uproots the first emotional attachments of the child within the family group.*

*Freud A and Burlingham D*

Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham's early work in English war nurseries with children separated from their parents during World War II broke new ground: their observations focused on the nature of children's attachments, on social and emotional development and the dynamics of group care. Decades later, relief and development workers, often pre-occupied with children's material needs, have rediscovered the concerns that Freud and Burlingham held as primary. Yet, a significant historical difference must be acknowledged. Most of the children in the care of Freud and Burlingham had been intentionally evacuated from London and the whereabouts of parents was well known, with some visiting regularly. In contrast, the scale and scope of displacement in today's complex emergencies are staggering. Children and adolescents invariably account for over 50 per cent of any population displaced by emergencies and when armed conflict and civil strife are causal factors, that percentage tends to be even higher. The protracted nature of these conflicts (Afghanistan, Angola, Somalia, Sudan, and so on) and the deliberate targeting of the civilian population and infrastructure,

dramatically increase the associated risks for children, especially those who are young and separated from family and community.

## Not making matters worse

*A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment ... shall be entitled to special protection and assistance.<sup>2</sup>*

Through a developmental lens, the articles of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) are intended to ensure for all children the necessary conditions for normal, healthy development. Operationalising the articles of the CRC in the context of an emergency, however, presents a formidable challenge to professional practitioners and policy makers alike.

In July of 1994, I was part of a team sent to Rwanda and across the border to Goma (then Zaire), to undertake a situation analysis of children and adolescents affected by the genocide and the massive displacement that followed. That experience was followed by sustained periods of time in Rwanda through 1995 and included repeated visits to the many and diverse care centres that were established to attend to the needs of separated children. One of my strongest impressions from that work was the number of very young children in residential care and the extent to which their broad developmental needs received, at best, marginal attention. Massive dislocation tears the fabric of society, undermines local institutions



Photo from Nta Nzu Itagira Inkigi (see page 16)



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and disrupts the less visible but no less important network of human relationships and informal associations that traditionally care for children in communities. Experiences of loss and separation are high-risk factors for young children and in the context of chronic poverty, often set in motion the accumulation of further insults and injury. It is a simple fact that separated or unaccompanied children (children who are separated from both parents and who are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible to do so) are at higher risk of neglect, abuse and exploitation than peers who retain some traditional network of support.

#### **Documentation, tracing and family reunification**

Young children's attachment to a primary caregiver is readily observable. Classic descriptions note that most children will seek them out for play or for comfort when distressed; that children are less distressed in unfamiliar situations if they are with them; and that they soothe distressed children more easily than do other people. Because young children's bonds and attachments to caregivers and family members are more important to their immediate welfare and are far more fragile than attachments that exist between adults, emergency situations require that priority be given to preventing family separation.

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Active tracing efforts are critical for preserving primary attachments. Given the limits of their ability to provide accurate information on their situation, registration and documentation efforts are most complicated with young children. Searching out and thoroughly documenting information from anyone who knows the child becomes an urgent, critical task.

More passive approaches to tracing, such as sending messages and waiting for a response can be important to long-term reunification efforts, but sole reliance on such methods can not meet the 'best interests' test with regard to young children. Active, rapid tracing is also essential because displaced populations are often subject to repeated dislocation, potentially placing guardians and children farther away from each other or beyond the geographic scope of more passive tracing methods. Priority must also be given to keeping sibling groups together, not simply for the sake of information but because siblings can help to nurture and care for each other.

The issues of evacuation and adoption are most acute in emergencies and have special bearing on the situation of very young children. From earlier experiences such as the 1975 Vietnam 'Babylift', to the more recent examples of young children from the Former Republic of Yugoslavia in Germany or Rwandan children in Italy and France, the processes involved with return and social reintegration are complicated, long-term and not without substantial developmental risks. International standards on evacuation and adoption in emergencies have been established but are not well known or uniformly applied.<sup>11,12</sup>

#### **Interim care for displaced children**

It is generally accepted that the placement of separated children into residential centres should be a last resort.<sup>13</sup> Within these institutions, emphasis should be placed on establishing a sense of normalcy, addressing children's social and psychological needs, and fostering family-like bonds.<sup>14</sup> In Rwanda, the different origins of the institutions

and their varied support structures generated strikingly different approaches to childcare. These help illustrate some of the central dilemmas involved in responding to young children in emergencies.

In general, the more children are appropriately involved in their own care, the better. Having older children provide care and support for younger children tends to be culturally appropriate and can enhance a sense of competence, build self-esteem and reinforce prosocial behaviour. The importance of providing continuity of adult caregivers in children's institutions cannot be overestimated.

The term 'interim care' implies a temporary situation. Yet all too often, children's stay in residential settings becomes protracted. Even when children are successfully reunited with extended families or placed in substitute families, their best interests are not always assured. The children of receiving families may experience a genuine drop in their standard of living, sharing scarce attention, space, food and

#### **The extreme case**

An extreme situation outside of Georgia involved a previously existing orphanage that had received continuing support from an international agency. The centre's staff had moved the original Zartbi children away from the orphanage, and began to take in Burundian children entering the country as a refugee population. From 1992 to 1994, the orphanage housed 1,000 children, most of whom were under the age of five. The orphanage was run by a former teacher and a former nurse. The orphanage received no direct financial support from the international agency, but the agency provided what was available. At the time of the last estimates, noted that over 120 children per day were being admitted to the orphanage. Staff members on the ground were aware that while some young children were indeed orphans, based on birth records, the majority were not, at least at first and many of the mothers were not known or identified.

On a first visit to the particular centre, staff directly bargained with a group of boys with knives and saws of weapons that, by July/August 1994, accommodated over 2,000 children. While efforts were soon instituted to prevent further separations, and other programmes began to try to reconnect children with their families, many young children continued to endure the developmental risks associated with long-term institutional care. Needless to say, committed and well-intentioned agencies and individuals had been overwhelmed by the situation and indeed, initial policies to help children back home and actually made matters worse.

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Photo from *Nta Nzu Itagira Inyigi* (see page 16)



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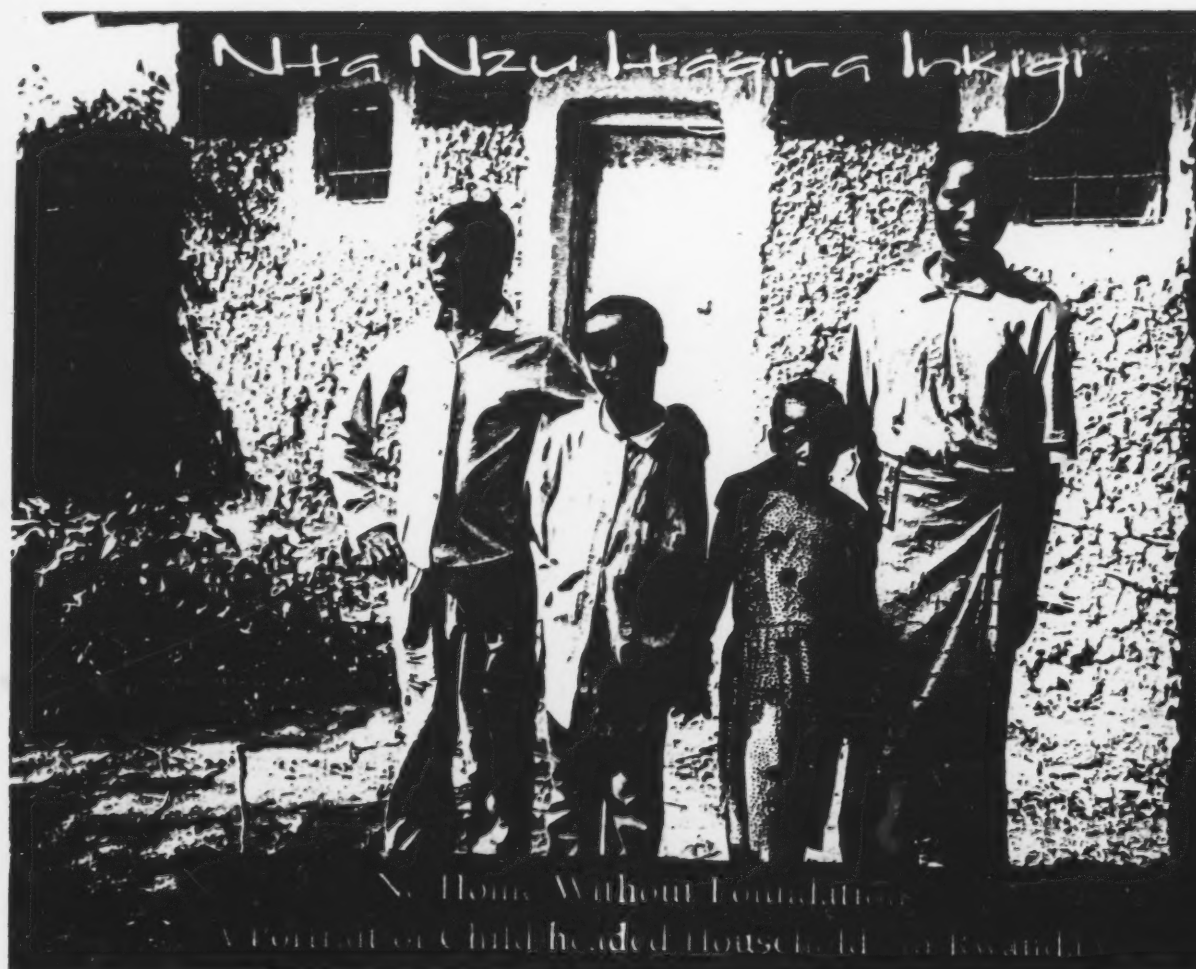
Bernard van Leer Foundation **14** Early Childhood Matters



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The illustration that accompanies this article was taken from the book 'The Home Without Foundation' by Noah Hember and David Cooper. The book is a collection of stories and photographs that tell the story of child-headed households in Rwanda. The book is written in a simple, straightforward style that is easy to read. It is a powerful and moving work that sheds light on a often overlooked issue. The book is available for purchase at [www.africanews.com](http://www.africanews.com).

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discarded tin cans to make drums. Quite readily, with a small group of children, we were all producing a rhythm and laughing out loud – part of which may have been directed towards what some felt was our foolishness.

While walking outside another centre and being followed by a group of children, we stopped at a sand pile and began to collect interesting bits of junk, broken bricks and pieces of cardboard. With not a word said, a few of the children quickly joined in. Over the next half-hour, we created with the children a network of roads and houses from the cardboard and bricks and were driving cars (the small objects) in various patterns around roadways ploughed in the sand.

All of this developed without any exchange in Kinyarwanda or English. Much of the activity was imitative and occurred as parallel play, and children engaged in similar activity next to each other but with little direct interaction. But there were still many poignant moments of communication, whether through facial expression, laughs, or making ever louder noises of moving cars and trucks.

The above example does not account for knowing who, in a given culture, has the permission to be most openly playful with young children; nor was it informed by an appreciation of what traditional games, music, songs or activities might have been most appropriate. Observations that note a lack of play or the seeming inability of children to engage in meaningful play are suggestive of developmental problems.

During these visits, however, it seemed especially important to demonstrate that Western, manufactured toys should not be a priority concern. The vast majority of pre-school age children everywhere can engage in symbolic play with whatever is available: a tin can becomes a bowl or a house just as readily as a stick becomes a boat or plane. Small empty tin cans lend themselves to the pleasure of repetitive scooping and pouring.

In this work, we found comments suggesting that children were 'just playing' the most difficult to overlook. It is important to acknowledge that children are active agents in their own development while, at the same time,

knowing that simply leaving young children on their own is no pathway to development. Creating opportunities for children to practise emerging competencies is terribly important, be it imitating social roles or the basic tasks of building sensory-motor co-ordination. It is true 'there is no development without play'. Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development'<sup>9</sup> refers to that area between the child's actual, achieved development and what the same children can accomplish with informed assistance. Fundamentally, it is about the role of caretakers, teachers and more capable peers, and about their capacity to appreciate the importance of play and provide children with appropriate pathways to stretch and expand it. Young children readily intuit, judge and respond to the genuineness of those who would engage them.

Extreme conditions provide us with a special lens through which to view children's strength and resiliency. There are few rewards that surpass experiencing young children's pleasure and sheer glee when fully engaged in play. ○

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# Guatemala:

## Working with the Mayan-Ixil people

Claudio Tzay

*First and foremost I should explain that Guatemala is a multicultural and multilingual country of ten million inhabitants. Approximately 63 per cent of the population is of Mayan origin, forming 24 ethnic groups. One of these is the Mayan-Ixil. They speak their own language, and preserve their own values, traditions and forms of seeing and understanding the world. This is an ethnic/cultural reality that must be respected and supported.*

However, the state educational programmes are inappropriate because they are based on a culture that imposes its own models – for example: linguistically (it is a monolingual, Spanish speaking culture); in pedagogic content; and in terms of social direction. Indigenous people have very little access to education, and teachers don't communicate with children because of their different languages.

The consequences are very obvious: high illiteracy rates; failure; truancy; and absenteeism are all much more serious problems among the indigenous population, above all for children and women. At a deeper level, it is not just a question of inefficiency, but of the education system becoming an agent of cultural aggression that produces an identity crisis among those who are educated and who are operating in the wider society.

In contrast, our project starts from a deep respect for the Mayan-Ixil culture; and we use a bilingual and multicultural educational methodology in our work with children, their parents and communities.

### **The rationale for the project**

The idea has three roots:

– first, the region in which the Mayan-Ixil people live suffered most from the armed conflict that was a fact of life in Guatemala for many years and that has only recently come to an end. It generated great violence, and caused uncounted deaths as well as massive displacement, all of which had the most profound consequences for the

population. In these circumstances, we wanted to provide a programme for children of three to six years because they are the most vulnerable and the most affected by the violence.

Second, according to official data, none of these children receive initial education; less than five per cent has access to pre-primary facilities; and only 32 per cent has primary schooling. We wanted to produce alternatives to an educational system that marginalises Mayan-Ixil children.

Third, despite so much suffering, the Mayan-Ixil people have jealously preserved their culture and its values. We wanted to develop innovative

**Claudio Tzay** is the General co-ordinator of the Foundation-supported pre-school Niños Indígenas Desplazados (Displaced Indigenous Children) project that is operated in an area inhabited by Mayan-Ixil people in the Quiché region of Guatemala, under the auspices of the French organisation Enfants Refuges du Monde (ERM - Refugee Children of the World). His experiences before joining this project include working for five years with adolescents who had migrated to an urban area. This project was designed to develop an approach to tackling the problems faced by the rural communities that the adolescents came from. One outcome was a highly motivated and experienced group in which each member was capable of mobilising communities to resolve their own problems. Immediately before joining the Niños Indígenas Desplazados project, he worked in a bilingual programme of the United Nations in the Mayan-Ixil area, helping to resolve communication problems between teachers and children.

approaches to early childhood development that were drawn from this culture.

We also recognised that it is important to work with these pre-school children because it not only helps their development but also has the long term effect of protecting and rescuing the Mayan-Ixil culture.

#### **The two most difficult problems**

In common with other minority cultural groups in developing countries, the Mayan-Ixil people face many problems. However, there are two that are especially significant in culturally appropriate approaches in early childhood development work.

The first is the restrictive and inappropriate pedagogy of the schools: the work is rigid and mechanical, and it does not allow laughter and play. Children are expected to work in silence and to listen to the teachers - who mostly speak in Spanish. This

environment limits the development of the child. In contrast, the kindergarten environment is better because, for example, children are encouraged to play, sing and communicate with their companions. This does cause problems when they move on to formal schools: their new teachers meet them with incomprehension. But this is slowly changing because of discussions in villages, because of the conviction of parents that they should participate in the education of their children through educational committees, and because of the impact of the indigenous organisations that are now emerging.

The second major problem is the extreme poverty of the families. For the Mayan-Ixil people, one consequence is that their children do not attend school or, if they do, they abandon it because they have to work in the fields or migrate temporarily with their parents to the coast to find work and money. Poverty also severely affects the participation of parents in the

education of their children and, indeed, in the operation and management of kindergartens.

**Our objectives and how we reach them**  
In our work with Mayan-Ixil people, we have several objectives. They include:

- implementing a programme that meets the physical and psycho-social needs of the children through games and highly animated and participative activities designed to develop their potential;
- helping to preserve and recapture the Mayan-Ixil culture, and to validate it at regional and national level; and
- seeking a better integration of the child into the formal education system and into society, an integration that is based on valuing the Mayan-Ixil culture. We want children to be self-confident, and confident about their own culture in a multicultural world.

We reach these objectives through a number of means. For example:

- by promoting the participation of parents in providing a favourable development environment, and in the education of their children;
- by preparing Mayan-Ixil people to work as Educators in their own communities, basing their work on what those communities have decided that they want;
- by using a multifaceted and multidisciplinary approach;
- by offering a holistic and bilingual education;
- by organising the Educators into an association called Asociación de Promotores de Educación Bilingüe Mayan-Ixil (APEBIMI - Association of Promoters of Bilingual Mayan-Ixil Education) that promotes and defends the Mayan-Ixil culture; and



## A day in the life of an Educator

by training young people from the communities to participate in the work. This also includes breaking down their isolation by taking advantage of the regional links that APEDBIM has.

APEDBIM itself has concrete objectives, such as social sustainability. At the moment, Enfants Refugiés du Monde is the roof that covers everything but what happens when it has gone?

The programme must be sustained then, but the parents and community committees need time to develop and mature in what they are doing. A complicating factor is that many older people in the community committees are illiterate and mostly communicate in their own languages. APEDBIM is developing much more rapidly and – to give itself more political power and effect – is integrating with populations outside the area or that are made up of people who have worked elsewhere and have gained more experience in development processes. It is also associated with a group that is involved in educational reform at the political level, also in the Mayan Council, which is made up of representatives from many Mayan organisations. This group

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can sustain a programme; have effect at ministerial level; bring together groups; look at what is happening in communities and programmes; support, train and strengthen community members; answer their questions; and make them protagonists in their own development.

In general, the educational modality that has developed is based on interculturality: a growing together on the basis of mutual respect between the different cultures. What else is appropriate for a multicultural and multilingual country such as Guatemala? We expect organisations like APEDIBIMI to change the future.

#### **Men and women in the Mayan-ixil culture**

This project is unusual in that so many of the Educators are men whereas in most other projects that we know about, it is the women who take on these responsibilities. The reasons for this lie in the Mayan-ixil culture: it is the men who take on, or are selected for, leadership roles, mostly because they have more training and travel opportunities than the women. However, the culture has always

accepted the need for balanced participation between men and women, in the family and in the community. Nothing good can come out of any action or decision that lacks one or the other: both must be involved.

#### **Developing appropriate materials**

Important educational materials have been developed – important in the sense that they are both effective and drawn from the Mayan-ixil culture. One example is the Teaching Cards that are used by the Educators. These are in sets and each set is about a particular area of early childhood education. For example, there are sets about observation, experimentation, pre-writing, pre-mathematics, music, physical expression, and so on. To make sure they were culturally appropriate, the materials were developed with the local Educators who use them.

Another example is the 'Morral de Cuentos' (Story Sack). This is a bag that contains four bilingual books: an introduction to elements of Mayan-ixil history and traditions; a book of traditional stories; an Educators' guide to the stories; and a technical manual

about animation techniques to use with the children. Assembling this presented tremendous problems. For example, very few people could write down the stories, partly because Mayan-ixil is largely an oral tradition, partly because of the lack of literacy skills. Then we had to find translators who could work to a high level in both Mayan-ixil and Spanish. However, the results more than justify the amount of effort needed to produce the Story Sack: it is not only an extremely effective tool but also a validation of Mayan-ixil verbal and written traditions.

#### **The immediate future**

We are at the stage when we have to consolidate our achievements so far. This will include:

- strengthening the Educators' organisation (APEDIBIMI);
- motivating parents and strengthening their participation in the village educational committees – this is to ensure a lasting participation on the part of the communities in the future;
- achieving ministerial recognition that leads on to a real integration into the

educational system, including the employment of the Educators and the paying of their salaries;

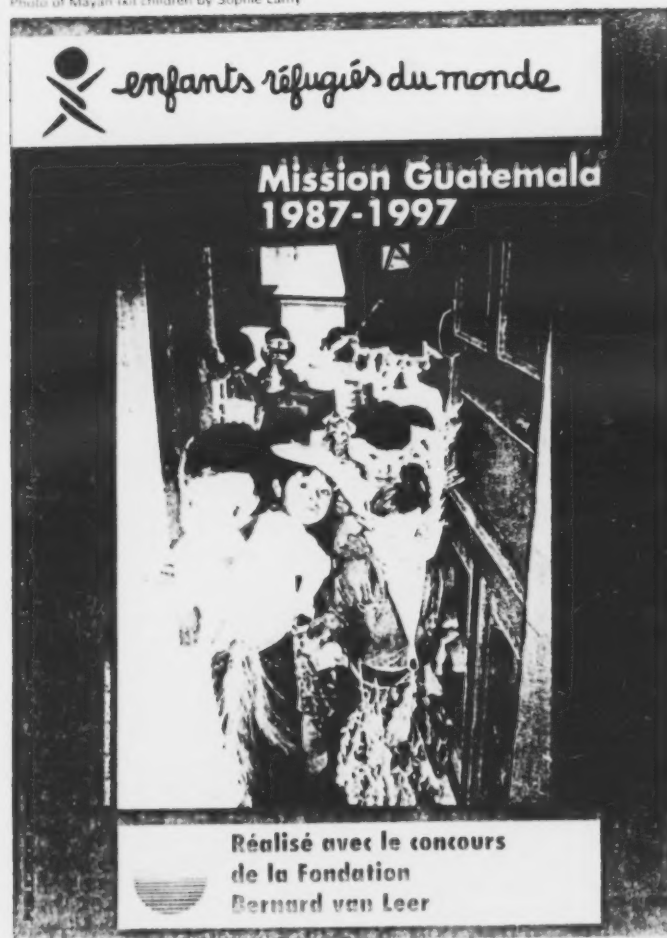
- providing opportunities for formal studies for the Educators so they can be recognised professionally; and
- taking advantage of the peace in our country to disseminate our approaches to pre-school work, through APEDIBIMI.

To summarise: we will have to work more on the participation of local agents of change; on institutional co-ordination; and on ensuring the viability, growth, solidity and sustainability of the project.

#### **Personal reflections**

After having been with the project for three years, I find that there are several positive outcomes. The first is that the programme started as an emergency programme for displaced people, but evolved and developed into a holistic informal education programme centred on young children and everything around them. Parents noticed the impact on their children: that they played and called out, that they had changed – for example, most children

Enfants Refugiés du Monde report Mission Guatemala 1987-1997  
 Photo of Mayan Ixil children by Sophie Lamy



going to school for the first time cry and don't want to stay, but children who attended kindergarten bounce into the school and are very happy to be there. Positive impacts like these are especially important for the parents because they haven't experienced much school themselves and haven't previously thought of school as important.

Also positive is the impact on the policies of the government. An Educator who has been selected by his or her own community and who has been prepared to do work at this level, is now recognised as important by the Ministry of Education, and given the title 'Educator'. There is also a recognition of the importance of pre school education; and the Educators are integrated into the education system at pre primary level. This is one of the most important achievements of the programme.

Of course, I also have some negative reflections. Many of these involve the amount of time it has taken to get this far. This is because not much could happen when there was strict military control. We had to account for all our movements, and all the villages had a representative of the military government reporting on who was doing what. Since the whole programme is based on the involvement of the families, these restrictions effectively made that approach impossible.

From 1992/93 onwards we could begin to collaborate more with the government and social sustainability became a possibility. With more organisation in the communities came more commitment, and the government became interested in matching social sustainability with structural sustainability - taking programmes into the mainstream. Now, with the

peace agreement, younger people are starting to work together once again. The older people are hesitant to take a high profile role because of the war and the bad experiences they had. There is still no certainty that peace will prevail but the younger people want to get organised and get something done.

Another bad point is the bureaucracy in the Ministry. The Educators spent almost three years negotiating for recognition. They almost made it, then there was a change of Minister and they had to start again. It took masses of paperwork for each individual Educator, all of which had to be perfectly produced in every small detail for at least 10 different authorities in the education system. Even now there is checking by a local administrator, and by regional ones, and so on, right up to national level. But it isn't much to bear given the importance of what we have achieved. )

*Chen Bram is an applied anthropologist, social psychologist and organisational consultant. He is a graduate of the School for Educational Leadership in Jerusalem who, in recent years, has been involved with the absorption of tens of thousands of immigrants to Israel from the Caucasus area and Central Asia. In this he has been an advisor to the Ministry of Absorption and to local councils, as the initiator and facilitator of a leadership course for Caucasian immigrants held in the School for Educational Leadership, as well as in other capacities.*

## A culturally oriented approach for early childhood development

Chen Bram

*In this article – a substantially shortened version of a much longer presentation – he offers an overview of a major programme of settlement of immigrants into Israeli society; and draws out a series of guidelines for the effective implementation of such enterprises. He also discusses the important lessons that have emerged. Many of these focus on the need to understand difference in all its complexities and subtleties, as incoming cultural groups encounter the established cultural groupings. In his view, individuals and families have a complex array of different identities that derive from ethnicity, religion, profession and region. More of these can and should be accentuated.*

### **The importance of the culturally oriented approach**

Early childhood development involves an encounter between the cultural world of the family, and that of any other representative of society engaged in caring for children. In work with immigrant families, the cultural background of the family will often differ significantly from that of the professionals who come into contact with the children. The basic question in each is, how can we construct a bridge across cultural difference, adapt our work to the family's culture, and fully utilise the resources of the home and of the organisations and personnel engaged in pre-school work? The point is to ensure that the 'system' contributes to the development of children in the most effective ways possible.

The aim of what I call here a 'culturally oriented approach' is to create such a bridge. Underlying this approach is a recognition of the fact that culture is a key variable that colours all of the activities connected with a particular group. This does not mean that culture is the only variable. Economic, political, and other components play central roles, but the cultural variable is the cause of disparity between populations in these realms as well. In other words, even those topics that ostensibly are not directly connected with the group's cultural components need to be examined in reference to its cultural identity and characteristics. This is particularly true of issues connected with early childhood care, in the socialisation process, that is the heart of every culture.

This article presents a number of considerations to be taken into account in constructing a culturally oriented approach to support the development of pre-schoolers. They are drawn from experiences with Olim ('those who ascend' – the Hebrew term for Jewish immigrants to Israel); more than 60,000 'Mountain Jews' as they are known (Gorski Evrei in Russian, or Johor as they call themselves) from the Eastern Caucasus and tens of thousands of Bukharan Jews from Central Asia. To add to this complexity, I take into account the fact that those working with pre-schoolers also come into contact with young parents born in Israel, thus dealing to a limited extent with multicultural societies in general. Overall, my considerations are also based on insights from the field of



anthropology and, to some degree, from cross-cultural psychology.

**Familiarity with the cultural group involved**

This is an essential and salient stage in developing and applying a culturally

illustrates this problem. More than 700,000 immigrants arrived in Israel from the former Soviet Union. They break down into several cultural groups. However, officials did not take note of this division in the early years, but referred to all the immigrants as 'Russians' or 'from the Soviet Union'. The only distinction that was made was based on a general sociological difference between broad (although not always precise) categories of 'Ashkenazi' (Western) Russian Jews, and those 'Asiatic' (Eastern) Jews who came from eastern and southern parts of the former Soviet Union. This generalised perception took hold and prevented the field workers from becoming familiar with groups such as the Mountain Jews from the Caucasus and the Bukharan Jews from Central Asia. Each of these groups comes from geographical regions quite distant from one another, and has its own language and distinct characteristics. Even worse, the sociological distinction went hand in hand with a negative labelling and attitudes that ranged from a sense of cultural superiority to contempt. The first stage in formulating culturally oriented programmes must thus be a recognition by professionals and policy

makers of the cultural variance and cultural uniqueness of each group, so that field workers will be well aware of these distinctions. Without this it is impossible to design programmes that will take into account elements of the target group's culture; it is also impossible to recruit staff who are suitable for work with the relevant groups.

Another dilemma is embedded in the issue of identifying the group, something that is beyond the generalisations stemming from a lack of knowledge or from stereotypical perceptions. It concerns the tension between sociological and anthropological approaches, as these were expressed in the perceptions of professionals working with the relevant cultures. Sociological approaches tend to generalise different situations between groups on the basis of salient social variables, while anthropological approaches stress the disparate and the unique features of each culture. In the case of large-scale immigration, there are similar sociological processes between groups – for example, regarding the status of the father in patriarchal groups that immigrate to an environment with a

Community Centre programmes of the Israel Association of Community Centres span the entire community from early childhood to the elderly. Programmes for early childhood include daycare centres, afternoon centres, clubs, and more.

The community centres have worked hard to assist in the social absorption of immigrants. They provide a meeting place and offer special programmes. A large number of immigrant teachers and guides have found work in the community centres in the fields of crafts and sports, and as professional workers.

*From an explanatory brochure published by the Israel Association of Community Centres*



oriented approach, particularly in the case of 'Western' societies that tend to lump all cultural groups from developing countries into one general category. The example of the Mountain Jews and Jews from Central Asia in Israel

different language and a more liberal character. On the other hand, one can also stress the differences within every society in the concrete manifestation of such an event – they have different implications for all elements of life in each cultural group.

One example is in the treatment of pre-school children among immigrants to Israel from the Caucasus and from Bukhara. There are similarities based on traditional patterns such as patriarchal, and patrilocal (a family that live in the fathers' location and – usually – in the father's family). However, in their new situation in Israel, where in many cases the wife will be the breadwinner while the husband is unemployed, it seems that more fathers from Bukhara tend to take responsibility for their children's education, from a very early age. In contrast, families from the Caucasus tend to preserve the home/outside division, in which the wife is responsible for education and the husband is less involved in day-to-day affairs. Many workers clearly tend to proffer sociological explanations that lead to generalisations about populations, and usually relate less to approaches that emphasise the

difference between diverse cultural groups. This is linked to the dominant place of sociological concepts in most of the programmes training professionals for work in education and community service. Sociological approaches are very important, since they provide the professional who is unfamiliar with the nuances of each culture with an explanation for general processes that take place. But when the intention is to develop a culturally oriented approach, there is a catch here: insufficient attention is paid to what it is that distinguishes and separates different cultural groups.

#### **Key characteristics of the group**

In order to develop a culturally oriented approach to a group, it is essential to become familiar with its key characteristics. Obviously, one cannot demand complete cultural literacy of educators and professionals working with pre-school children of diverse cultures, but there are several domains that one must be knowledgeable about. Cross-cultural psychological approaches that make generalisations between different cultures on the basis of key variables help us to understand the differences between cultures. But when

an educational or caregiving project is involved, a culture must be defined by the concrete elements that identify it. The unique features of a culture are its system of values, norms, ideologies, beliefs, symbols and signs that add up to one whole system singular to that culture. A culturally oriented approach has to allow this value system to be given expression in early childhood education, and to intercept and bridge conflicts between this system and the one prevailing in the culture of the relevant professionals. In the process of becoming familiar with a particular group, it is important to note how various values/beliefs/symbols are expressed in relation to the following:

- self-definition;
- language;
- preserving group boundaries;
- special group history;
- traits of family structure and the values of family life; and
- internal variance vis-à-vis shared community boundaries.

All of these are important for mapping work with pre-schoolers; and many others also merit detailed consideration, including:

- values and norms in relation to sexuality and gender roles;
- key symbols and words in the spoken language;
- body language and gestures;
- diet and clothing;
- modes of relating to the body;
- modes of relating to time and space;
- various rituals; and
- attitudes towards religion and religious identity.

#### **Educational settings: the child vis-à-vis the family**

There are many diverse settings for early childhood care, each with a different role to meet different needs in the development of a culturally oriented approach. Among those existing in Israel, are Well-baby Clinics, daycare centres, kindergartens, programmes for pre-schoolers in community settings (particularly for parental guidance), community work programmes with families, and so on. It seems particularly important to examine every programme in relation to the extent of work with the family as a whole or with the child alone. In kindergartens or daycare centres, most of the work is conducted with the children only. Unquestionably,

community programmes working jointly with mothers and children are more capable of building a bridge between the family as a whole and the new society. The main advantage of these programmes is their ability to integrate the entire family in the work with the children. In some cases/programmes, it is also possible to carry out some of the guidance work in the children's homes. This enables the worker to grapple with questions related to the children's environment and to serve as a true bridge between the homes and the new environment. In many immigrant societies, the social institutions tend to stress the children's assimilation through the educational institutions, thereby creating a large gap between the children and their parents. A culturally oriented approach should strive to find points of contact with the parental home despite the difficulties and the inevitably more rapid integration of the young generation.

#### **Joint work with community workers and mediators**

In intercultural educational programmes, it is important to set up and use a work force from the immigrant culture, and to create an

ongoing dialogue between it and professionals and workers from the dominant cultural group. Mediators (the Hebrew word literally means 'bridge-builders') from within the relevant culture help the professionals in their contacts with group members and help the group members exercise their rights to social, educational and other services. The employment of mediators has proved to be particularly effective in creating a transition from strangeness to familiarity in work with a group of another culture; and, no less importantly, in the way the members of the group themselves perceive the various frameworks of caregiving or education. After a certain time, the professionals engaged in various systems will have acquired enough information to enable them to work directly with the group. The mediators in the meantime, have learned about the systems and can find employment, especially if they have some professional education.

#### **Socio-linguistic issues**

##### *Early childhood programmes for teaching a new language*

It is extremely important to expose very young children to the dominant

language of the society because their knowledge of that language will affect their ability to enrol in various educational settings in future, and can have an impact on their future potential for social mobility. However, their mother tongue also plays an important role in the socialisation process. Through it they receive various expressions of affection and bonding, as well as training and instruction from their immediate family members. These will influence their overall development in emotive domains and in their perception and utilisation of their cognitive abilities. A key challenge in developing culturally oriented approaches for early childhood is to come up with creative solutions to cope with this duality.

##### *Legitimacy of the language of origin and the encouragement of multilingualism*

Early childhood programmes are a key factor in acquainting children with the new language. However, while the new language is being taught to the children, their language of origin can also be given legitimacy. This can be done by not rejecting it or viewing it as worthless, and by emphasising the value of multilingualism, also as a tool of

linguistic socialisation for their families. Experiences of professionals with families of Caucasian origin in Israel shows that the most successful integration takes place when the children drill, read and recite in Hebrew under the guidance of the early childhood instructor; while their mothers encourage them to continue conversing in *Johori* as they cope with the difficulties of learning Hebrew.

The problem becomes even more complex when the home language spoken by the community is replaced by another language, even prior to emigration. The child is then exposed to three languages – in the case of the Caucasian Jews: that of the new environment (Hebrew); the main language of the previous environment (Russian); and the home language (*Johori*). Here, caregivers must take into account that language has different meanings and functions. It also has a symbolic value, and is a sign of identity. Even if translation and explanations are made in the more dominant language, a place should be reserved for the home language. This can be done by encouraging the use of terms of affection in this language or the

expression in it of folk tales, lullabies or proverbs.

*Literate, semi-literate and non-literate cultures*

Insofar as language is concerned, it is important to know whether the culture in question is literate, semi-literate or non-literate (an oral or spoken culture). Any approach to families from a non-literate culture based on conventions from a literate culture – such as an emphasis on reading as a central basis for educational evaluation, or a demand that the parents must read – is doomed to failure. It is best in this case to try to combine these 'worlds of meaning' by emphasising their affinity – for example, by jointly reading well-known texts from the legends and lore of the group. Or by translating stories or songs popular in the oral culture into the new language as well as into the dominant language at home (from Johori to Russian and to Hebrew in this case). The main problem, as we found in our experience in Israel, is to mobilise the resources needed for these activities, since they are not perceived as functional in the short term.

**Social change and attitudes towards 'undesirable' customs**

Workers in care centres found that mothers from the Caucasus brought with them certain child-rearing practices that seemed 'primitive' or 'wrong' to them. It is better to see that many customs were logical in the immigrants' original environments, but had lost some of their rationale and purpose in the new environment. This is more productive than to label such practices from a Eurocentric viewpoint. Attempts to explain the need for stimuli to Caucasian mothers were often met with the reaction 'We also grew up' – that is, without any stimuli. It is a mistake to assume that these immigrants had no interest in investing in the development of their children at

a very young age. An attempt to understand the process of cultural and environmental change is more productive. In the multigenerational way of life in the Caucasus, children spent a great deal of time in the courtyard surrounded by many family members and much activity. They were not lacking in stimuli. This situation is totally different than the one these immigrants encounter in Israel – living as a smaller family in a small apartment in a housing project. If workers are aware of this difference, they will understand why stimuli matter.

Instead of stressing the ineffectiveness of the customs of the cultural groups

we are working with, we ought to stress the function they fulfilled in their old environment and what changes are needed to have them fulfil these functions in their new environment. This calls for openness and a recognition that the society will want to preserve certain customs even if they differ greatly from those of the teacher or the caregiver – for example a nearly shaven haircut for very young children from certain areas in the Caucasus since they believe this helps strengthen the hair. It also means allowing the group room to find modes of change arising from its own culture. I do not claim that there are no moral borders to the acceptance of customs. But usually problems here are not associated with radical examples; rather they serve as an excuse to reject any customs that are different.

**Auxiliary frameworks and personnel training**  
Intercultural sensitivity is a subject that extends beyond specialisation in a specific culture. Exchange of



Photos courtesy the Israel Association of Community Centres



information and experience among professionals with a common interest – like early childhood care – is extremely valuable. It is also important to foster the sensitivity of professionals to culture-dependent issues. This can be done through meetings held between people engaged in the same sorts of work. Such meetings are meaningful as long as their purpose is to share experiences and arrive at insights about intercultural situations, but caution should be taken to avoid generalising about populations that at first glance seem to be similar, and categorising them as 'traditional', 'patriarchal' and so on.

#### **Attitudes towards the other society and culture**

It is advisable to make a distinction between two different, but interconnected things: attitudes towards the culture, and attitudes towards a specific group. This distinction can be helpful in identifying points that impede the development of cultural orientation.

In the case of attitudes towards an alien group, complex mechanisms operate in relation to concepts of social and ethnic categories, and no less complex, to basic

attitudes towards alien cultures. In an encounter with an alien culture – and sometimes even preceding it – beliefs and opinions are formed which render it difficult to develop cultural orientation.

In a course on education among mountain Jews, for example, one of the lecturers (a veteran immigrant from Russia), describing her experience with this group, made the earnest claim that 'the folk tales of this group are mostly violent'. According to her, this is reflected in behaviour, in the attitude towards children, and so on. In actual fact, the stories of the members of this group are no more violent than those of other groups, and certainly less so than some of the fairy tales told to children in many Western societies. The lecturer's claim reflected Russian stereotypes of members of Caucasian groups. Such stereotypes originating from generalised attribution of exceptional cases to an entire culture, often reflect mainly ignorance and fear, and can have long-term negative influences on the image of various cultures. It is unquestionably possible to find traits of value and beauty in every culture, and it is important to emphasise them.

An important lesson I learned after trying for three years to change the patterns of absorbing culturally unique groups of immigrants in Israel, is that the ethnic images and categories that are formed, are sometimes not an outcome of the nature of the cultural group being absorbed. Instead, they are a result of the structure and nature of the absorbing society and its culture. In many instances, workers and educators speak fervently about the need to learn about the different culture, while at the same time continuing to cling to basic – unfavourable – assumptions about the nature of that culture. One way of approaching this issue is to try, for a moment, to separate the workers' professional conceptualisations from their subjective feelings. In workshops with people who worked with Jews from the Eastern Caucasus and from Central Asia, a professional, pluralistic outlook was predominant when professional issues were being discussed. But the picture changed, however, when an in-depth discussion was held about their personal feelings when immigrants move into their town or neighbourhood. The absorption of thousands of Jews of the Caucasus and Central Asia in small and medium-sized

towns in Israel caused very difficult social situations in some cases: local workers felt that, from the standpoint of the settlement's achievements, the level was 'sinking again'. To cope with these deeply rooted ethnic and social conceptions and categories they must be brought to the surface and dealt with, rather than swept under an attractive carpet of pluralism and cultural orientation. In the final analysis, educational processes and programmes cannot be cut off from the social environment in which they take place. A culturally oriented approach will be marginal unless it relates to the general environment using a community-wide approach.

Sometimes a gesture of interest and recognition towards the culture of the children and their families is no less significant than studying structures or traits of the culture through a functional approach. It is in fact, a key element in the development of a culturally oriented approach. An example makes this clear. At the end of a workshop for community and education workers that was held in a town in the north of Israel, a worker from the Caucasian community, who

serves as a mediator between the members of the community and the local school system, announced a forthcoming cultural evening: a salute by the Caucasian community to the town on the occasion of the State's fiftieth anniversary. He asked all workers to make a special effort to attend the evening, which would include performances of music and dancing related to the community's culture.

He pointed out that in this way they could meet the other side of the culture, not only the social dilemmas relating to the difficult processes that these workers normally cope with. 'Just imagine how meaningful your attendance will be for the little children whom you work with in the kindergartens and the schools who will be there with their families. On the other hand, just think how disappointed they will be if at this evening, which is intended for the entire settlement, there will be almost no guests from outside the community.' This may be a very Israeli example, but one can still learn from it.



Photos courtesy the Israel Association of Community Centres

#### Summary

Three basic elements are required to develop a culturally oriented approach to early childhood care: identification of the group and its basic cultural traits; identification of key cultural variables that are important for work in early childhood programmes; and ongoing work on attitudes towards the group and its culture. These three elements are interdependent. Keeping in mind the idea of an axis 'strangeness-familiarity' can also be helpful: cultural orientation is after all to a great extent an attempt to move from strangeness to familiarity with the culture of the group with which we are working. It also requires us to cope with questions of integration versus the separate treatment of different cultural groups, while taking into account the attitude of the group members themselves.

Cultural orientation is not compatible with approaches that advocate the full assimilation of different cultural groups into the dominant culture. Nor should it lead to the formation of isolated cultural islands or too broad an inclusion of individuals within a uniform group identity. We must keep in mind that individuals and families have a complex array of different identities – ethnicity, religion, profession, region, and so on – and can and should accentuate them.

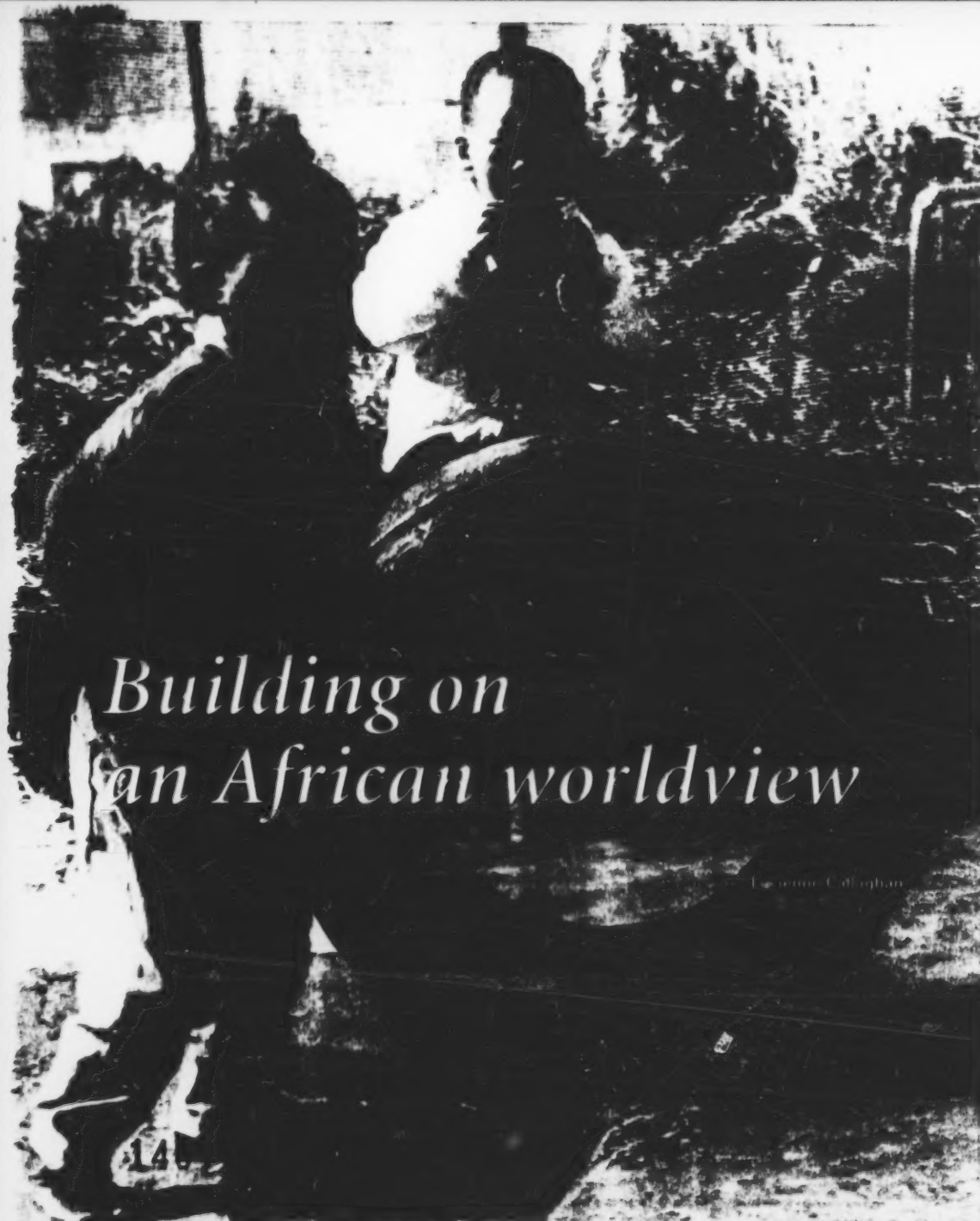
The identity of the group and of the original culture of the group into which a person was born, carry a special significance. Assigning value to the original culture and to the mode of early childhood care of different groups, does not mean automatically

accepting every custom, nor does it mean adopting cultural relativism. It does mean recognising that in every culture there are worthwhile elements, and that if these are rapidly replaced by other

models, this will be harmful, rather than productive. It also means recognising that changes in modes of education and early childhood care should take place from within the culture of origin and in conjunction with it, not in conflict with it. ○

Chen Bram has asked us to say that he welcomes questions and comments. Please either send them to the Editor of *Early Childhood Matters* at the addresses shown inside the front cover; or direct to:

Chen Bram,  
16 Zeev Sherf St,  
Jerusalem 97842, Israel;  
fax: +972 2 656 5307;  
email: chen@sef.org.il or  
kenanie@netvision.net.il.



## *Building on an African worldview*

Leanne Callaghan

Photo courtesy of Queenstown Early Learning Centre, South Africa

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Western concepts of education have devalued indigenous cultures and traditions so much that they are seen as being anti-progressive and somewhat outdated. In this article I will mention and refer often to African communities, as these are the communities which have been the most disadvantaged and marginalised in South Africa and which fall within our target group.

For me, an appropriate way of measuring the success of our work would be to judge the degree of independence of the communities with whom we have worked. One must make the assumption that caregivers/parents are well able to do what is best for their children, if they have access to support and information. In this way we can be sure that our role is one of support and is not prescriptive and undermining of the caregiver: the latter has been the norm in far too many examples in the history of our profession.

### **Appropriate support and worldviews**

The concept of support is a matter open to wide interpretation and controversy. Experientially, however, in the context of the high unemployment rate and the often appalling conditions to which families living in informal settlement are subject, and because of the history of South Africa, support in our opinion needs to be very much broader than the present narrow and compartmentalised way of thinking. Indigenous culture is alive and ever changing, and is being defined and re-defined by our communities as they practice an African culture which

The author is Regional Co-ordinator of the Foundation-supported Kopanang Consortium Project, Danhof, South Africa. Six training agencies are involved in the consortium, and the overall objective is to maximise early childhood development efforts in informal settlements in Orange Free State Province. The project targets playgroups run by mothers who have been prepared to become para-professional caregivers, and aims to upgrade caregivers' skills, and train trainers to support both young children and their communities. In this article she challenges the validity of 'educare'. Educare is the most widely found model of early childhood provision in South Africa. It is generally centre-based, depends on trained personnel and is often quite formal in nature. Lucienne Callaghan calls instead for a new approach that derives from African' cultures.

emanates from a particular African worldview. The Eurocentric worldview tends to look at the whole in the context of the separateness of the parts. In view of the apartheid history of South Africa – and indeed much of the world, due to colonisation – the Eurocentric worldview has become the norm against which other cultural ways have been measured. The Eurocentric worldview was also used as a frame of reference to which other cultural groups were supposed to aspire. This has left many South Africans who head up educare organisations operating from a predominantly European worldview.

I would venture further to say that this has caused a blindness and inability to see and value Africans in the African context, even though they have already successfully practised childrearing within the framework of an African culture for centuries. The scourge of that same blindness evolved to a near-sightedness, which has been at the root of our greatest frustrations in working

with communities. This has contributed to the obvious lack of scale, impact and replication of our programmes that only reached seven per cent of the entire population. I believe that even now, learning from Africans, and valuing and incorporating the essence of indigenous child rearing practice may yet prove to be our greatest strength in finding answers to many of the questions that the 'Western' world of centre-based, early childhood caregivers are now raising. These include questions around the resilience of children; and what it is that they need for the present to better cope with the challenges of adulthood. Another question is about how differing interpersonal and cultural norms produce different types of adults. How can we learn from and use this information to help us to continue to support our children who will lead our world into the future?

It has become clear that often people with the best intentions, whose frame of reference is different to the

indigenous one, and who head up educare organisations, seem to perceive things differently from the people in the community, whom the work or support is meant to serve. Problems have arisen as a result. For example: there still seems to be dysfunctioning in working with communities where black educare workers are concerned. Decisions are made on behalf of others and one can see how tokenism, even with the best of intentions, can occur.

Many educare programmes do not offer enough of a pragmatic response in addressing some of the problems – in the overwhelming majority of cases, the focus is on marketing and delivery of the programme. In my opinion, the focus needs to broaden, to accommodate some of the wider

economic realities that affect the communities in which the programme is delivered. To illustrate this, sometimes we find that the need is to listen and to try to assist parents in getting access through the local structures to basic amenities like water, housing, food subsidies or health care for children. This also includes parent awareness information that is given by social workers and health workers as a free support service, therefore ensuring support for parents rather than support for the child only within our programme. I am concerned when we find that the majority of parents are not in a position to sustain many of our 'well structured' programmes. All of the above serves to address some of the issues that affect the broader community. It shows that there can be a stronger link between the greater

“ Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, (the) normative average and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow them to be more like us ... Elizabeth Minnoch<sup>2</sup> ”





Photo courtesy of Queenstown Early Learning Centre, South Africa

issues of community development which speak to the home environment in which the child lives and develops, and the issues of educare which have direct bearing on the child.

#### Who owns what?

We have found that ownership of educare programme information, delivery and management by parents and community members is not fully encouraged by educare training organisations. They have made working in educare a profession that stands to lose the status and control that individuals feel is their right, even though this control is at the expense of those who these programmes are supposed to serve.

Educare programme policy does not always encourage programmes to be owned by and delivered on a long term basis by the parents themselves in their own communities. As a result, impact and replication of the programmes are limited by the number of

educare training organisation delivery staff at any one time.

This information should be made freely available to all parents. Withholding it undermines the ordinary caregiver who is made to feel inferior because doing this overlooks the resilience, wisdom and the oral tradition which African parents have been taught to value.

#### Identifying, invoking and co-ordinating support services

If we could continue to listen to, and learn from, the African worldview, seeing a holistic and integrated way of looking at the family and the universe, we might see things in a new way. We might then be able to make a paradigm shift in the way we see the future of educare in its African context. For example, training agencies that are already strategically placed in our province might serve the entire community, providing an information base for immunisation, growth monitoring, nutrition, health, literacy, parent discussion

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*We celebrate as South Africa continues to draw strength from the fountain of her rich cultures, and wisdom from her timeless tradition.*

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and youth groups. Activities in these centres could take on a more integrated and inter-relational vision of development, which might better serve the realities of the communities with which we work. Funds that are being raised for the specific purpose of educare training might serve the more functional purpose of training educare workers to become para-professional community workers who would be trained in basic legislation on all matters relating to the family. For our part however, a practical way of doing this would be to acquire information on such things as the rights of women and children under our constitution; how to deal with the trauma of child abuse; how to produce food; and so on. Also included should be all information relating to the way in which the government supports the family and information on how to link up and tap into community support. This information should be given through existing educare training conduits to all parents and caregivers in communities.

One of the greatest tragedies is that assistance is often available but there is

a dire lack of information amongst educare workers. This is because they previously took the view that 'all of this development stuff has nothing to do with us and falls outside the ambit of educare'. We challenge this narrow way of thinking: the communities in our target group call for a broadening of vision when dealing with their needs.

We call for a more sensible channelling of current resources, as well as a more whole and perhaps better-balanced training and equipping of existing educare training agency staff in responding in more appropriate ways to the needs of the family. It is in this context that we can bring up the question of the limitations of our capacity to deliver on many of the primary environmental needs that exist. Information is vital in the empowerment of people. As NGOs we need to tap into the immense government and private sector support systems which have been mentioned above and which are already in place in our country at provincial and local level. In this way educare could become extinct in its present limited

form. A transformed educare system could then confront and assist individual stakeholders and the government to take on issues of community empowerment and upliftment, income generation and sustainability in the long term. In this light how relevant the question 'Why early childhood development per se?' becomes indeed!

I would venture to say that the centre-based educare facility has a role to play in serving the minority of working parents who have access to no other means of provision for their children. But no longer can early childhood development be defined within this narrow centre-based educare context, and no longer can this model be mainstreamed and idealised as it has been for so long. This model still serves a minority of South African children. But due to its high cost, its replicability and sustainability still remains questionable for the majority of parents and caregivers in South Africa.

We celebrate as South Africa continues to draw strength from the fountain of her rich cultures, and wisdom from her timeless tradition. We find that she continues to emerge resilient, bringing to the fore her own stories, values and lessons. I am convinced that the finding of answers to the questions of the future of the African child lies deep within the African family and the rich, strong, living, growing, sustaining African culture which is reflected in us, her people.

#### Notes

1. 'African' refers to people of African descent. It had a particular meaning in South Africa, when people were categorised according to colour. The other categories used were: White, Coloured, Indian, and Black. 'Black' included African, Coloured and Indian people.

2. The Centre for Research on Women, Wellesley, USA.

# The basis of human brilliance

Rebecca Adamson

Rebecca Adamson is President of the First Nations Development Institute, Virginia, USA; an organisation that she founded with an unemployment cheque and, as she says, 'a dream' in 1980. Today, the Institute is nurturing culturally appropriate economic development among Native American populations, with an operating budget of USD 1.4 million, a revolving loan fund of USD 1 million and a fund that provides about USD 1 million in grants each year. Key to its operations is the notion of 'indigenous economics: economics with values added' – Native American values, that is.

In the 1970s, Rebecca Adamson was Director of the Coalition of Indian Controlled School Boards, helping communities to gain control of their local schools, and helping to restore the teaching of native languages. Outcomes of this work include the establishment of Tribal Colleges, and the passage of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Acts that allowed Native Americans to run their own schools, and their own law enforcement, environmental protection, welfare and other programmes.

In this interview with Jim Smale, she takes an international view across a number of very different cultural groups, finding similarities and drawing out the value of many significant cultural elements that can benefit the development of young children.

*Rebecca, tell us something about your background as an indigenous person in a multi-ethnic country.*

By the time I was twelve I was looking at the world differently from most of the teachers and many of my classmates. I remember being told 'facts' about American history and thinking that

these were interpretations. Like in conflicts between an Indian tribe and a settlement, at that early age I wondered why it was a massacre if we Indians won and a war if they won. Then I began to realise that so many of the values and the intangible ways of respecting and sharing and listening that I was taught, weren't the norm. In High School one child borrowed money from another, who wrote it down in a little book. I was fascinated. There was nothing wrong with it, it was just different. That giver expected to get paid back and the borrower expected to pay back and they kept a record of it. In the way I was brought up, you would give the money and there was a reciprocity to it: that person might give it back or help you when you needed help, or might give to others when they were in need. Later, I realised that a term we have here in the United States – 'Indian giver' – has been denigrated to mean that, when you give something, you take it back.

*Has your background influenced your choice of work and the way you carry it out?*

When I began to work professionally, I became more and more aware that there

were almost no opportunities for the tribes to be independent or to determine their future. Some were offered national government programmes but these did not reflect the traditional values. They were not being passed on, taught, reflected anywhere or encouraged at all. We have to have a balance on these things, but our traditional values weren't even on the table. My approaches to my work have their roots in the traditional values of my people and in my wrestling to reflect them. The economics of development don't seem to allow much room for approaches based on the traditional values that I believe in. So we have created an institution that is very analytical and strategic, and that is based on understanding the differences between an indigenous economy that may include many important cultural values, and a 'Western', profit-driven market.

One crucial value for us is co-operation and a sense of community. It's a question of being members of a team and strengthening individual team members, not of competing to destroy anyone else in the team. These values underlie all aspects of my work. For example, values that are inherent within

the tribal community emphasise community. They see the land as the essence of their spirituality and the key to their survival. The community is the fabric of life and children are not a cost, they are our future, the survival of us as a people. A very interesting thing about being Cherokee is that traditionally you could marry a Cherokee woman and you took her name and all of the children took her name. Then you could divorce a Cherokee woman and she could divorce you, but all of the property, the house, the tools – everything – stayed with the children. So the value was on their future. In our country today, children are seen as property that the parents fight over. In the Cherokee community kids are seen as extremely sacred beings unto themselves.

In our work, in determining our grant making, we look at a project's ability to increase the value of vibrant initiatives of personal efficacy, self-esteem, confidence, and risk taking in the community. We call it entrepreneurship. It is investing in our people so that there is a return and a growth in the human capital and

### Elements of development

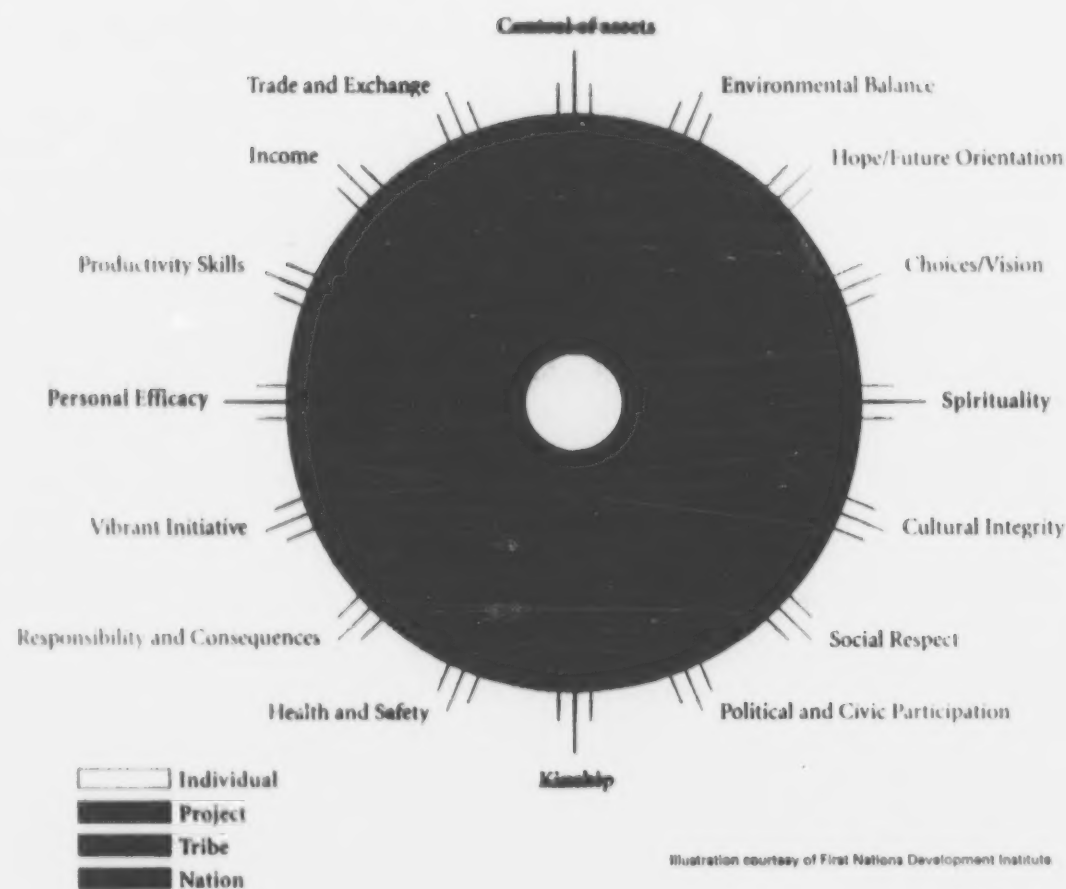


Illustration courtesy of First Nations Development Institute





To create this painting, I reflected over my journey home, identifying different phases of emotion I went through, that I thought no one else could possibly understand.

The hand belongs to the person who is coming home. The colours of the hand change from concrete grey representing the confusion of identity and environment to those who do not know who they are and/or where they come from to white ochre representing the strength of spirit that is within all of us, black ochre representing the journey home to the reality of our identity, yellow ochre representing the turbulent nature of life back home.

ourselves and with those around us and finally red earth, which represents our coming home to mother earth and our family.

Once the person has come home, you then find your family connections, which criss cross the land.

*Heather Kewarre Shearer*

*The complete version of this painting was used for the poster advertising 'Bring them Home' the 10th Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day 1997. The day had the theme 'Implement the recommendations of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families.'*

human capability. So many of us have been devastated by oppression, poverty and racism. Our role is to rebuild the human capital in our community. We start by believing in ourselves, feeling confident enough to try something new, having the ability to trust one another again, and being able to take risks. Even being able to fail, to get up and start again. We suffered from one of the most deliberate social re-engineering efforts, when our children were taken away and put in boarding schools. It is a sophisticated art to raise human beings. So when all the kids are taken away for two generations, you have to rebuild even parenting skills.

I think our work approach is very unique. Generally, economic success is not evaluated on changing people's lives for the better. It is based on deliverables, 12-month budgets and report deadlines.

*I would like to bring out something else from you that I think is extremely valuable. People have to survive. There should be possibilities for income and material betterment, all in the context of beliefs and background. You have a way of somehow finding the necessary money or opportunities.*

I think that's because our strategy is asset-based. Communities often think in terms of what they need or don't have. We get them to refocus on what they do have. They may have land, timber and water. They have culture, people, and some money coming in from welfare or a lease of their land. Then we look at how to control, leverage, repay and increase the assets. It's a very practical approach. An example is the number one poorest county in the United States: the Pine Ridge Indian reservation in South Dakota. Twenty thousand Lakota people live there and they

have about USD 3,200 annual income for a family of anywhere from four to eight. Now, you would look at that and think they have absolutely nothing of value. But we discovered that the flow of funds from the reservation into the bordering communities represented USD 233,000,000 in spending. We set up the first micro loan fund on a reservation that really looked at those tiny, little things they did at home. They mended fences, they built vases and rough box coffins for the cemetery. And we looked at how to increase the income they got to do it. We came up with over 112 activities that people did. Those things exist in all communities. That's entrepreneurship: recognising what is going on and the brilliance of it; taking a different perspective and revealing the assets and potentials.

*Let's move on now to young children specifically. To the things you would like to see in them, the approaches you take, the values and attitudes that are natural to your own first nation and that you would like to see preserved and maintained through them.*

I would like to see the divorce law shift. To see people take partnership, parenting and having children much more seriously. Property should be for the kids. We have to celebrate parenting and growing up and the experience of childhood much more. We have lost a lot of the rituals that Indian people had to celebrate the child's entrance into adulthood. Within the Navaho tradition there is a huge feast in honour of the very first laugh of a new baby. We have lost the mythology that explains the universal truths of life and how you fit your purpose within that huge universe. Our kids are now overwhelmed; completely lost. The understanding is not being passed on to them.

I would also like to ensure that the child will not be selfish. What we have now is a society that says you get rewarded with money. And the only way you can get money is to follow a contradictory set of values, without incentives to reward co-operation and sharing. In Cherokee story telling tradition, the rabbit is Mr Trickster, Mr Deceiver, Mr Breezy. He has all those values that we don't want the children to have. In our stories, time and time again, he gets himself into a lot of trouble and into

the craziest situations. At the same time he is not portrayed as demonic. In a gentle way the stories show human foibles that we can laugh at but don't want to encourage.

*What we have now is a society that says you get rewarded with money*

*The creature that is in the wrong is not made to be evil. There's no real exclusion; there's room for negotiation, for understanding.*

Exactly. Another Cherokee value is to avoid conflict. You see face to face conflict in soap operas and on talk shows all the time. It is the antithesis of what Cherokee conduct would be. We want to raise our children not to enter into conflict lightly, but to be very respectful of the other person. The way of parenting a Cherokee child is through questioning. It helps them discover for themselves the knowledge and the learning. Children are considered sacred. It is within them

already. The path is to find it and discover who they are. So you are not telling that child what to do. It provides a lot of freedom for the child in those early years.

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*In many other cultures the values were lost for a generation or more. In some aboriginal communities in Australia for example, the grandparents understand values and the old ways of life and why they were important, but the parents don't. The children are now being exposed to the old cultures, the old ways of reflecting, thinking, responding and understanding, and they are going to teach the parents. Did you face that kind of break in continuity?*

Very much so. It rolled across our country in different generations. My grandmother was forbidden to speak her language, so she never passed it on to my mother, who then didn't pass it

on to me. Now it's being introduced to the school. The pattern was the same. Native American children nowadays carry the complex burden of combining three cultures: their traditional indigenous culture; a culture of oppression, disharmony and disruption; and a culture that is modern in its concepts, technology and opportunities. These three dynamics come together within each child today. And the modern culture isn't one for good parents, isn't one for full human beings to thrive and grow. It's one that destroys your self-identity, that leads you to alcoholism and abuse. So much anger gets inbred in you that it's the antithesis of the traditional values. So, emotional and psychological turmoil is part of these children's growing up. The suitable role models are gone. Either they are old and totally traditional or they are statistically apt to be alcoholic. The role models we need are based on the ancient knowledge and traditional values, but also have the technological skills.

*What can be done when children from minority cultures – with very profound values centred in people rather than in material things – run into conflicts with*

*other cultures that set the social norms and values that most people live by? Confidence in their own culture is a good start, as does coming from a warm nest with a strong purpose. What else?*

We know what makes healthy children. We have to invest in the communities to make that a guaranteed right of children, while at the same time confronting the political system which is a barrier for what the children of tomorrow will need. The activities that bring grandparents and young kids together need to be supported; grandparents can be brought into schools, young kids can be brought into the elderly homes. And they should have story telling times, because those are real times. We have to recognise the cycle in each person's life. My father didn't have a lot of time to spend with me when he was out earning a living. So my grandparents did. You have a particular role based on your age and where you are in life. After my dad became a grandfather, his life had slowed down, he had retired and he told my daughter more stories than he had ever told me. It's a very natural concept, but nowadays we have split the family from this extended support system. It

has to be recognised that every single parenting unit must have an extended support system. So when that little mind is asking a question, it gets a full sincere genuine response.

*But how can they counter the material culture that they're surrounded by?*

The only thing that replaces materialism is spirituality. It is the essence of who we are. That spark of spirit is the core. If you don't have that, you have a hole, and you fill it with the best tennis shoes, the fanciest car, the prettiest diamond. This almost insatiable appetite of materialism and

a world where the message is materialism and consumerism.

*You've recently visited the San people of Botswana and some of the Aborigines of Australia. Did you find any resonance?*

There was tremendous resonance. When you listen to people's stories with great respect and awe, they feel that. What's fascinating is the way they have used their brilliance to survive in whatever the environment is. It is amazing that the San can survive in the Kalahari Desert. The brilliance of the technology, of their tools, is awesome. And those tools are very specific to the

“

*And they should have story telling times, because those are real times*

”

consumerism replaces that third sense that places you in relationship to other people and to all of creation. We have to get back to the sacredness of creation and life. That's the only thing that will give indigenous people strength to hold on to their identity while functioning in

values in their cultures that were extremely non-materialistic. Not that every indigenous culture was solely non-materialistic because they did gather certain material goods for survival. And some societies were very sophisticated in the amount of material

goods that they produced and in their redistribution of wealth vehicles. But the value was on sharing and making sure that everybody had enough. That happens across the borders in different ways in all the indigenous communities.

And even many of the differences were only environmental. The sacred giver of life was salmon in one place, buffalo in another and with the aborigines it was the goanna (lizard). Whatever animal was the main food source.

*It's fascinating to look at the number of similarities there are in child raising practices too. There is a tremendous consensus about what is good, dubious or downright bad.*

One similarity among indigenous cultures is having the full extended family to raise the child. The British royal custom of giving the kids out to somebody else to raise, would blow our minds. By disconnecting at that basic level, that poor child grows up in a way that denies the human relationship. It would be the way to build a race that wants to control life, feels superior to the natural world, and sees nature as the enemy.

*You came from a completely different culture but one that has many parallels with the cultures that you encountered. What did you take with you – and was there anything that the people in these very distinct places were glad to hear about from you?*

It is powerful, as an indigenous person, to carry my people's history and experience to other indigenous communities, because the history is the same. First they take you from the land, take your kids away, destroy your spirituality, deny your culture. -

Then you become alcoholic and try to kill yourself. Basically you are dying anyway, so why not? This history is an important parallel. And what they were particularly glad to hear was a validation of their own experience. A community in Botswana had been told that they were the only people in the world who were causing this trouble about their land. So it was powerful when I said 'This happens everywhere around the world to indigenous people. They want your land. But there's lots who are winning this fight.' Their eyes just got huge. That little bit of validation probably changed their life:

*'Say, wait a minute, we are right. We want to stay.'*

Because of today's political landscape we have to make an economic argument. Well, it's very straightforward. You cannot strip a people of every single asset and expect them to be self-sufficient. Nobody could do it. That's the bottom line. We need to uncover the lie and call it a lie.

*And what do you think you learned from them?*

I learn every time again the generosity of spirit that is alive in the soul of the indigenous people and that is the basis of human brilliance. People know what they need and what should be done: they just don't have the resources or anyone listening. There are some key solutions to today's problems in each and every one of those communities. The solution is not outside of us, in the laboratory or market. You have to go and make it work yourself. ○



Cover illustration for the  
"Kuru Development Trust"  
Activity Report for 1997 and  
Annual Report for 1998





## New publications from the Foundation

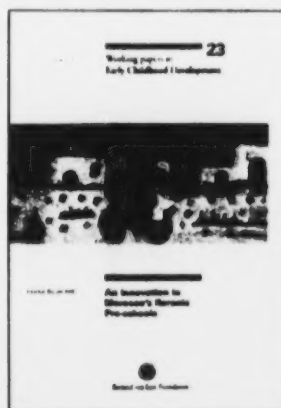
### **Community Owned Development** by Braam le Roux

The Kuru Development Trust (KDT) in Botswana is a development support programme that is owned and controlled by the communities in which it works, the majority being San or Bushmen communities. Its wide range of activities includes income-generating projects, a savings and loans scheme, cultural activities and a training programme. It also operates a pre-school project in which mother tongue community members are trained as pre-school teachers, and communities are supported to run their own schools.

After working for a number of years in a specific area, KDT felt that the time had come to develop into a support programme that would serve more communities and a wider area. Before doing this however, it looked back at the lessons it had learned over the years, and studied other programmes. This helped it to develop a clear strategy and a vision that would guide the KDT in its new work with the communities.

This paper sets out KDT's strategy and also takes an honest look at its approaches and philosophy, and how these have evolved through the years. As well as talking about the approaches that have worked, the paper also talks about mistakes made and the efforts that will be taken to rectify them in the future.

*Community Owned Development is number 22 of the Foundation's 'Working Papers in Early Childhood Development' series. It was published in March 1998 (ISBN 90-6195-048-1).*



### **An Innovation in Morocco's Koranic Pre-schools** by Khadija Bouzouba

This paper, translated from French, tells of AFAIE's work in developing innovative practices in working with young children, and introducing these into the traditional Koranic pre-schools of Morocco. This was not always easy for AFAIE to achieve, and *An innovation in Morocco's Koranic pre-schools* talks openly about some of the difficulties that it faced and some of the solutions it found.

The paper looks at how the atfale team, which operates from the Mohammed v University in Rabat, worked with the relevant authorities and ministries to have its innovative practices adopted by the Koranic pre-schools. The AFAIE team continues to work with these authorities and with teachers, and is gradually disseminating its approaches further afield.

*An Innovation in Morocco's Koranic Pre-schools is number 23 of the Foundation's 'Working Papers in Early Childhood Development' series. It was published in May 1998 (ISBN 90-6195-049-X).*

*Single copies of both these publications are available free of charge from the Foundation at the address inside the front cover.*

**Joanna Bouma, Series Editor, 'Working Papers in Early Childhood Development'**

## the 1998 poster competition

Following the tremendous response to last year's Poster Competition – approximately 500 entries – I would like to invite Foundation-supported projects to make this year's competition an equally big success!

This year you can enter photographs, children's drawings or even children's collages: the important thing is that they show aspects of early childhood development. The winning entry will become the Foundation's 1998 Poster and this will be distributed in more than 100 countries worldwide. Others will be used throughout the Foundation's range of publications.

### Criteria:

- photographs must show young children engaged in some kind of activity, experience or interaction that illuminates early childhood;
- photographs must be sharp and clear, with good contrast between the lightest areas and the darkest;
- photographs can be in black and white or colour, prints or slides;
- photographs should measure at least 9 x 13 centimetres;
- drawings and collages should be made by a child up to the age of 7 years old;
- drawings and collages should measure at least 9 x 13 centimetres and should be suitable for reproduction.

You can send in as many photographs, drawings and collages as you wish.

Please include the following details on a separate piece of paper, if these are available and appropriate for publication:

- the name of the photographer, or the child or children who made the drawing/collage;
- the context of the photograph – for example, at home, in a centre, within a home visiting programme, and so on;
- some details about the child/children who made the drawing/collage (for example, their age, where they are from, where the picture was made – at home, in a centre or within a home visiting programme, and so on);

- some details about the children and adults featured in the photographs and what they are doing;

- some details about what the drawing/collage is about;

- the location – country, region, town/village, and so on;

- any other useful or interesting information.

### Please note:

1. The copyright of submitted materials that we use will, of course, remain with the originator, but we may wish to use them in any other Foundation publications without specific permission. In this case, all will be credited with the name of the originator;

2. because our publications are free, we are not able to make any payment for submitted materials;
3. unfortunately, we are not able to return materials submitted, whether we use them or not.

Please send your contributions to arrive by the end of September 1998, to the address shown on the inside front cover. The results will be featured in the February 1998 edition of *Early Childhood Matters*.

Sonja Wehrmann  
Department of Programme  
Documentation & Communication



Photo courtesy of Hunter Caravan Project/Family Action Centre.  
Australia, an entry for the poster competition

## About the Bernard van Leer Foundation

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private foundation based in the Netherlands. It operates internationally, concentrating its resources on early childhood development.

The Foundation's income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer (1883-1958), a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist who, in 1919, founded an industrial and consumer packaging company that was to become Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer nv. This is currently a limited company operating in over 40 countries worldwide.

During his lifetime Bernard van Leer supported a broad range of humanitarian causes. In 1949, he created the Bernard van Leer Foundation, to channel the revenues

from his fortune to charitable purposes after his death. When he died in 1958, the Foundation became the beneficiary of the entire share capital of the then privately owned Van Leer enterprise and other assets. Under the leadership of his son Oscar van Leer, who died in 1996, the Foundation focused on enhancing opportunities for children growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage to optimally develop their innate potential.

In seeking to achieve this objective, the Foundation has chosen to concentrate on children from 0-7 years of age. This is because scientific findings have demonstrated that interventions in the early years of childhood are most effective in yielding lasting benefits to children and society.

The Foundation accomplishes its objective through two interconnected strategies:

- 1 an international grant-making programme in selected countries aimed at developing contextually appropriate approaches to early childhood care and development; and
- 2 the sharing of knowledge and know-how in the domain of early childhood development that primarily draws on the experiences generated by the projects that the Foundation supports, with the aim of informing and influencing policy and practice.

A leaflet giving fuller details of the Foundation and its grant-making policy is available, as is a Publications and Videos List. Please contact the Department of Documentation and Communication, at the address given inside the front cover.

### *Trustees:*

I Samrén (Sweden) Chairman, Mrs MC Benton (USA), JL Brentjens (the Netherlands), R Freudenberg (Germany), J Kremers (the Netherlands), HB van Liemt (the Netherlands), A Mar-Haim (Israel), JK Pearlman (USA), PJJ Rich (Switzerland).

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a pre-school teachers' training programme.

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Bernard van Leer Foundation

The bulletin of the Ford Foundation

OF THE FORD FOUNDATION

*Culturally or contextually appropriate?*

*Culture or context: what makes approaches appropriate?*

*When pit players take action together*

*And a young child will lead them*

*The new community publishing*

*Motivating in challenging contexts*

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Bernard van Leer Foundation  
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Tel: +31 (0)70 351 2040  
Fax: +31 (0)70 350 2373  
email: registry@bvleerf.nl

Editor

Editorial Advisors

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If you are interested in contributing to *Early Childhood Matters*, please contact the Editor for a preliminary discussion and to obtain a copy of our 'Guide for Authors'. Contributions must be related to early childhood development and should draw on direct practical experience with young children, their families and communities. Please note that the Foundation does not pay for contributions because *Early Childhood Matters* is generally distributed free of charge. Please also note that we allow free copying for non-commercial purposes.

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Cover photo: Partnership in Learning Project, Kopanong Consortium (Republic of South Africa)  
Photo: Phia van der Watt

Photo inside front cover: Vormingscentrum voor de Begeleiding van het Jonge Kind (Belgium)  
Belgian boy and Turkish mother and child

Photo back cover: COMED (Nigeria)  
Children perform the Edo dance

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# Culturally or contextually appropriate?

*This edition of Early Childhood Matters is centred on an analysis of culturally relevant approaches in early childhood development (14-16) recently undertaken by the Foundation. A consultant, Marinde Hurenkamp, conducted the analysis in conjunction with a small Working Group of Foundation staff. The broad objective was to learn from the accumulated experiences of 11 selected projects, as they are reflected in our archives. One aim was to explore how projects that work in culturally appropriate ways have to pay special attention in their work with children and parents to factors such as language, cultural norms, childrearing practices, familial relationships, and so on. The second aim was to highlight the ways in which projects working in different contexts handle relationships between cultures. The analysis is a subjective reading of hundreds of documents authored by almost as many people over many years.*

The consultant combed through documentation about 11 projects that take into account particular cultural attributes of the communities with which they work. These projects recognised the importance of cultural relevance in their approach, in their methodologies and in the content of the programmes that they developed. In order to tease out some of the underlying similarities and differences, projects that work in a broad spectrum

of quite different settings were deliberately chosen. The geographic spread covered Australia, Botswana, Malaysia, Guatemala, Argentina, Germany, The Netherlands, the United States of America, Colombia, and Israel and the Palestinian Autonomous Region. The chosen projects work with indigenous peoples in their traditional settings, with migrants, and in multi-ethnic environments. Some of the projects operate in areas that can only

be reached by foot or on horseback; others work with migrants in metropolitan centres like Berlin or Rotterdam.

## Culture in context

In the article that presents the results of these deliberations (page 6) Marinde Hurenkamp highlights some of the 11 projects in showing that effective culturally appropriate approaches means mapping the whole context. That includes discovering what the essential foci of the work should be, ascribing relative importance or priority to each of these, and identifying the kinds of resources that are available. After that it's a question of finding out what

ingredients have to be mixed to produce well – developed and appropriate programmes.

To justify this, Marinde Hurenkamp explains how she came to realise that, although it is possible to isolate elements that can be labelled 'culturally relevant', few of these are uniquely about culture. She also saw that all elements that projects acknowledge and work with are interlinked. Taken together they represent the particular context that determines why the project is there, what it is doing, and how it is doing it. To isolate some of these and try to discuss them out of their contexts is therefore of limited value.





Partnership in Learning Project, Kopanang Consortium (Republic of South Africa)  
Photo: Phile van der Walt

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To explain this, she uses the analogy of a 'filter' and a 'lens'. If you want to look at something through a filter, then you choose the filter that suits your purpose – in this case a filter that only allows culturally appropriate elements to show through. Looking through a lens instead allows you to do two things: first, to observe the entire picture; and second, to tighten your focus and look at gradations and relationships – gradations in the significance that is given to any element; and relationships between all elements in a given context.

#### Common threads

Her article also explores a number of threads that commonly recur in projects that work with ethnic or cultural groups, or in multicultural settings. In doing this, she also the variety of approaches and responses that projects demonstrate. One of these threads is childhood and childrearing. That there are differences in the ways in which childhood itself is conceptualised is well understood. What is emphasised here is the fact that, in many cases, childrearing takes place in conditions of change, changes that result from migration, from the encroachment of outside values, or from attempts by an ethnic or cultural group to find a secure place within a multicultural society. This implies new circumstances to which families must adjust, circumstances unfamiliar enough to affect and threaten – perhaps even damage or destroy – key areas such as perceptions of children's places in their

families, traditional practices and values, support systems for children and families, and so on.

A second thread is language and culture. (see box on pages 13 and 14) The article acknowledges that language is one of the fundamental vehicles for the transmission and sustaining of culture; and shows how all projects stress the importance of the mother tongue. Beyond this, language is often linked to the relationship between minority and majority cultures. Noteworthy here is work of the Peer Education Programme in the United States of America that includes articulating 'internalised messages of oppression', 'racial scripting' and 'unspoken messages'. In addition, three more of the projects work directly on issues such as cultural differences, prejudice, discrimination, solidarity and anti-racism.

A third thread is responses to contexts. Looking back as far as the 1970s, a general movement is clear. This runs from a community development approach that concentrated on ensuring children a healthy physical environment in which to live, to approaches that give equal weight to the psycho-social needs of children and their physical health, nutrition, drinking water and shelter. The article goes on to stress a wide diversity that demonstrates responsiveness to general problems such as isolation, while also showing the impact of local factors.

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To complement Marinde Hurenkamp's article, I have included articles that go into more depth about the approaches and work of two of the projects that Marinde Hurenkamp studied. The first is the Samenspel project based in The Netherlands that has developed a highly flexible methodology for working in culturally appropriate ways with children and their parents. It depends on certain procedures, structures and bodies of knowledge, but its flexibility derives from the absence of set patterns for either the approaches or the work itself. The flexibility is such that the methodology is successful with specific cultural or ethnic communities, and with multicultural groups as well. (page 15)

The second article deals with a project that is radically different from any other included in the analysis. It is the Sesame Street: Kids for Peace project, a new member of the famous Sesame Street family of television programmes for young children. It has been developed for Palestinian children and Israeli Jewish and Arabic children, to counter the messages of division and confrontation that they receive every day. The article reviews the complexities involved in producing programmes that can effectively promote respect and understanding. (page 20)

To further complement Marinde Hurenkamp's presentation, I have also included two articles that extend our understanding of how projects can develop culturally and contextually appropriate approaches to their work.

The first is from Zimbabwe and features the work of the Africa Community Publishing and Development Trust (ACPD), that specialises in a range of development activities under the title of 'community publishing'. Put very simply, this is a combination of two concepts: 'community development' and 'publishing'. By drawing on ACPD's Chiyubunzuyo Programme, the article shows how it sets out to transform poverty into prosperity in remote, severely poor areas of Zimbabwe. The core is an integrated economic, environmental, social and organisational development process. One main strategy is community-based research and writing coupled with the stimulation of all forms of creativity. (page 27)

The final article is about the Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU) in South Africa and its Community Motivators project. In multicultural settings that are also characterised by poverty, impermanence and violence, the project has found entry points and has supported communities in identifying people who can work to develop ECD activities. The article also shows how ELRU meets the training needs of the Community Motivators and provides continuing support for their activities. (page 37)

The next edition of *Early Childhood Matters* will be the first in a series that looks at 'Effectiveness for whom?' We are going to tackle the most difficult areas first: how do we know that what we do is effective for young children? And what ways do they have of telling us? The essence of this is finding out what children

really are seeing and thinking; and how they are responding as they grow and develop in their families, in their pre-schools and their primary schools, with their friends and so on. I hope to feature articles that explore how children themselves can tell us their stories. If you have something to contribute in this area that is drawn from your work with children, I look forward to considering it for publication. ○

*Ann Smeeth*  
Editor



Centro Infanzia Colibri (Nairobi)  
Photo: Dolores Sandino



# *Culture or context: what makes approaches appropriate?*

**Marinde Hurenkamp**

I was asked to undertake a piece of research and analysis for the Foundation into cultural relevance in early childhood development (ECD) approaches. This was to be based on archive material that the Foundation holds about 11 projects. In their respective contexts, these projects were all concerned with the relationship of children with their history and heritage.

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From reviewing the 11 chosen projects, I felt that I could produce a list of what seemed to be significant elements in a culturally relevant approach. With that in mind, a natural grouping of the projects suggested itself:

- **projects for indigenous children** (Intelyape-lyape Akaltye Early Childhood Project, Australia; Children of the Earth/San Child Development Programme, Botswana; Lessons From the Countryside, Malaysia; Growing Up, Malaysia; Niños Indígenas Desplazados, Guatemala; and Yachay Programme Argentina).
- **Projects for migrant children/parents** (Intercultural Parent Support, Germany; and Samenspel, the Netherlands).
- **A project for disadvantaged African American children** (Peer Education Program, USA).
- **A project for disadvantaged children in an isolated rural area** (Chocó Home Learning And Community Project, Colombia).
- **A television project for Israeli Jewish children, Israeli Arabic children and Palestinian children.** (Sesame Street: Kids for Peace)

My brief was to identify approaches to ECD that reflect cultural values; define in which ways these approaches are considered effective; describe project dimensions that constitute cultural relevance; and formulate a working definition of cultural relevance based on theoretical and programmatic experience, that helps place cultural relevance within a conceptual framework.

Initially I felt that it might be possible to create a grid or checklist of culturally relevant approaches that was drawn from the elements identified in the projects. However, I soon discovered that it was impossible to develop a coherent structure that could cover all the cultural settings that the 11 projects operate in. In consultation with a Working Group of Foundation staff members, I therefore abandoned the idea of developing the grid. But we were still concerned with selecting or isolating cultural elements associated with the projects. To attempt this, I identified elements that seemed very obviously 'cultural'. What I could then see was that each project appeared to have specific ingredients that could be labelled culturally relevant, including

indigenous language; kinship and family; relationship with the land; heritage and history and gender roles.

After further reflection and discussions with colleagues, it became clear that some of these elements were not necessarily only **culturally** relevant. I saw that some of them were relevant in many other contexts as well, including those in which culture was a central area of interest. It was also clear that none of them ought to be isolated from the context in which a project was working – indeed, each of them might be better understood in terms of their contextual relevance. Nevertheless this arbitrary classification of elements provided me with another perspective on the subject which was much more satisfying.

One way to explain this perspective is by using the metaphor of a filter and a lens. If you look through a filter that you call culturally relevant, then you see only culturally relevant elements and you filter out or eliminate all others from your view. On the other hand, if you look through a lens, you see everything that it is currently in focus and within the frame of the lens

whether it is culturally relevant or not. You can also move the lens around to cover all the elements that are there, seeing them all in their dynamic relationships with each other.

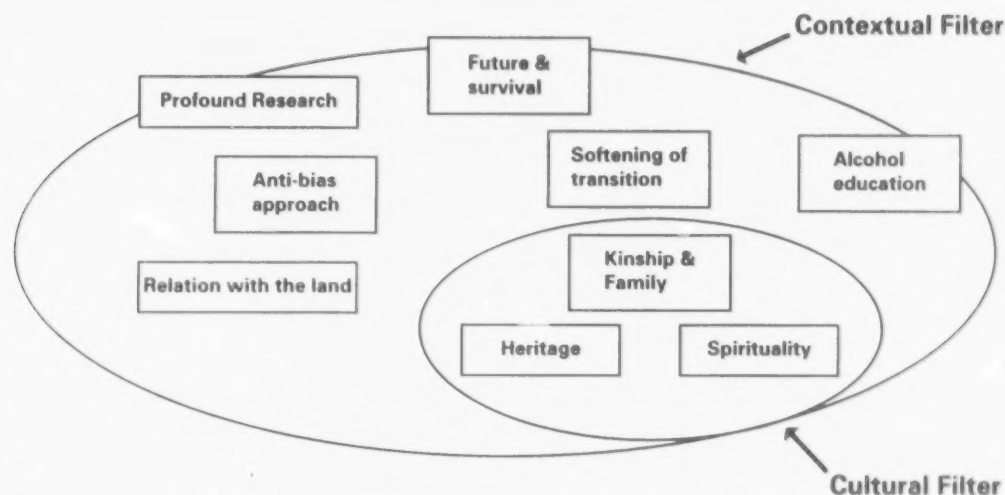
I started out by looking through what I thought was a culturally relevant lens but I was actually looking through a culturally relevant filter. Once I recognised that I had used a filter instead of a lens, I was able to see that ingredients that seem to be cultural, are actually arbitrary but vital elements that define any successful project that is properly grounded in its context. (See diagram on page 8)

#### Placing culture in context

The picture that emerged from the Foundation's archives is that many community-based ECD projects have a strong cultural component. Examples abound: they can re-establish the roles of grandparents and elders in child care; they can develop pre-school provisions that are based on traditional early childhood care and education practices; they can promote bilingualism in both young children and their parents; and they can operate



## CONTEXTUALLY RELEVANT LENS



within wider programmes that may include rescuing and revalidating their cultures, regaining long lost rights, and working towards a coexistence with more powerful cultural or ethnic groups that is based on mutual respect.

Using the culturally relevant filter singles out and exaggerates such elements whilst looking through a lens shows the totality and what is appropriate in that context. It also reveals the relative importance that each project gives to the cultural elements in its programme. In other words, the lens enables one to see an element in its context. You can see how a project is trying to offer the right contextual responses by taking the child's environment very seriously. You can also see the extent to which it is taking culture as a

wider concept as well. Obvious examples of this include the sorts of culture that can be determined by stress factors in the environment, stress factors that precipitate a culture of violence, or a culture of taking refuge in alcoholism.

The lens also shows you that a culturally relevant project does not necessarily have to be one that is working alongside minority ethnic groups. An obvious example is that of a project working with children in a deprived area of a major European city in which all the children are of one ethnic group. In this case, the contextually appropriate approach will take into account cultural differences that are to do with poverty – there is such a thing as a culture of poverty, a culture that is particular to its context.

### Childhood, childrearing, culture and context

From the documentation available, immense variations in conceptualisations of childhood, and in childrearing practices and beliefs become clear. What is most striking in this respect is that childrearing in many projects takes place in conditions of change. An obvious example is that of migrant families from rural areas of Turkey now living in a suburb of a major European city such as Berlin or Rotterdam – a focus for the Intercultural Parent Support project in Germany and a major focus for the Samenspel project in The Netherlands. In the new environment, much of the support that families could depend on in their original environment is now missing. In addition, the families' practices and values may contrast with those found in the new environment; while parents may lack some of the knowledge and skills necessary to function well.

The Children of the Earth project in the Central Kgalagadi Game Reserve in Botswana is for Basarwa children and their families whose traditional lands – and therefore livelihoods – are under threat. Studying the work of the project shows just what can be lost when traditional contexts shift or changes. For many centuries, Basarwa children have been raised to live in their traditional environment – the desert. They have been socialised and educated through listening, often taking part in every aspect of everyday life; and they have learned the tools or workings of their society in a very natural and unforced way from a very early age.

Children who now attend school may lose all of this because the schools do not cover such areas at all, never mind in these ways. Some Basarwa children inevitably drop out of school, partly because of clashes between what the schools offer and what the children need and expect from the schools. Schools also tend to be hierarchical whereas the Basarwa society is highly egalitarian; while, in general, the environment in which Basarwa children live and develop is not taken into account by the schools.

To counter this, the project encourages the beneficial traditional elements in childrearing, and has developed parent/child playgroups or mother/child groups that are alternative platforms for discussion of family problems, health, nutrition and childrearing practices. In these groups the parents can take an active role in educating and caring for their children under the guidance of trained people. Parents are encouraged to gather the children, play with them, tell them stories and engage the grandparents in the revival of traditional teaching songs. At the same time, people are relaxed, their way of dealing with the playgroups is intrinsic to how they live, curriculum and time schedules are not significant for them, and their way is relatively informal and flexible.

In general, the context includes an element of attempting to impose formality on the part of the dominant culture here that clashes with the Basarwa's own ways of organising. Basarwa people have had to learn to deal with this whilst not losing the values that are important to them. That means learning how to work with professional people who are in positions of power or authority over

their children, something that would be unnecessary if the Basarwa themselves had control over the schools.

Children who have experienced pre-school programmes that are rooted in their cultures will one day have to relate to the formal education system – something that all projects acknowledge as crucially important. Some Malaysian pre-schools and schools represent a break from indigenous culture and are often located far away so that children are physically far from their family and social niches. This led to the establishment of the pre-schools of Lessons From The Countryside and Growing Up projects. These are rural projects based on a recognition that indigenous rural school children do not cope well in main stream schools, many of them eventually running away or dropping out. The roots of the failure do not pertain to the children but to the system as it currently exists. The response is a range of indigenous people preparing their children for primary school on their own terms, and – to overcome major problems of performance and retention – helping children to cope emotionally with the formal school system. Learning about school culture, and cultural continuity are key elements of the pre-school programme.

Study of the Foundation's archives about the Niños Indígenas Desplazados project for displaced children and their families in a marginalised area of Guatemala, reveals a blend of culturally/contextually determined approaches and widely accepted child development ideas. Parents, *promotoras* and the community are all involved; and creative development and specific psychosocial needs of the children are given great importance, while playing and

Children of the Earth project (Botswana)

Father and sons

Photo: Matthias Hofer





Children of the Earth project (Botswana)  
Children eating *helet* food  
Photo: Hessel Visser

laughing help children cope with experiences of violence and exile. The pre-school programme also encourages children to express feelings and experiences (including experiences about war and hunger) through games, story-telling, painting, drawing, theatre, making sculptures and masks, and so on. Beyond this, children are seen as messengers who contribute to the general dynamics of the community;

and there's a sense in which they largely determine their own environment, or at least are very active participants in this process.

#### Responding to context

Reviewing the ways in which projects have responded to, and been shaped by, the contexts in which they operate, wide diversity is clear. The Chocó Home

Learning and Community Project in Colombia started in the 1970s, working for and with a distinct ethnic group – Colombians of African descent. It is set in a remote, rural, poor area and has always aimed to create better chances for children via an integrated programme of community development that included health, nutrition, sanitation, adult literacy, employment, and so on. With this went

more direct child development activities. The project's view was that concentrating only on the cognitive development of young children – the current thinking at the time it began – was insufficient and even irresponsible: children also have to have a healthy physical environment in which to live. Chocó is an early example of recognising that the psycho-social needs of children and their mental well being – influenced greatly by play – are as important as their physical wellbeing.

The Intercultural Parent Support project in Berlin, Germany is an extension of a programme for new mothers in Germany to include Turkish migrant families. The major questions that arose during the preparation stage of this extension were about traditional values and their place in a new context. For example, 'What do Turkish parents regard as a well-raised child?' Responding to these, the project studied and analysed individual aspects of Turkish migrant family life. The studies show that people did not feel they knew enough about early childhood developmental processes and many Turkish mothers expressed the need to

know more. In the case of values, *Saygi* – respect and regard for others – is still an educational priority; and the general view is 'I want my child to become a decent person'. German families on the other hand gave more importance to independence and self-reliance.

Another perspective that the project accommodated came from those Turkish parents who had themselves grown up in Germany: they had many critical comments about their own childhood experiences. For example: parents who as children suffered physical punishment and close control over their behaviour, often tried to encourage their children's ability to take individual and independent decisions.

In many projects, racism is recognised – at least tacitly – as a significant element in the development environment of children, and is seen as something that has to be dealt with. The Peer Education Program in Alabama in the United States of America aims to promote a curriculum that serves AfricanAmerican children, reflects their history and culture, and reinforces their basic learning skills. The flexible 'Peer Ed' model is a culturally sensitive form of attitudinal training for parents, child caregivers and administrators in which they aim to free themselves from internalised oppression. Becoming aware of their internal sense of inferiority or superiority is an indispensable part of creating a stimulating environment for the growth of AfricanAmerican children. The programme reflects a high level of

attention to age appropriate learning materials, the use of AfricanAmerican cultural materials; and individual creativity and expression.

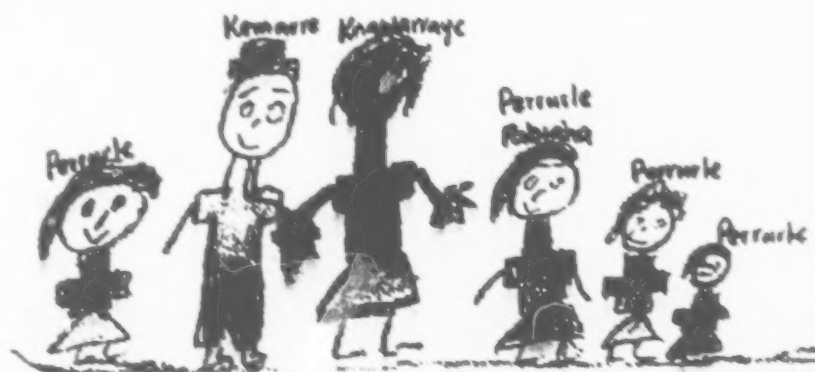
Going one step further, a joint Israeli-Palestinian team produces locally made versions of the famous Sesame Street television series to tackle cultural/national division. Each episode contains segments in both Arabic and Hebrew. There is also a second programme made in Arabic, with some Hebrew segments. The programmes have separate names: *Rechov Sumsum* in Hebrew; and *Shara'a Sumsum* in Arabic. Recognising that television is a major influence on children in this culturally volatile setting, the producers have set out to support the healthy development of children. That means maintaining a strong focus on such universals as mental, social, emotional and physical growth; and also exposing children to the cultures they encounter, breaking

down stereotypes, and helping to develop understanding and respect for others. (see page 20)

#### Conclusions

In general, each of the studies shows that being effective – producing worthwhile outcomes for children – means finding out what ingredients have to be mixed to produce well-developed and appropriate programmes. That means mapping the whole context, an exercise that reveals the essential foci of the work, ascribes relative importance or priority to each of these foci, and identifies the kinds of resources that are available.

Projects that include a focus on culture face complexities in their conceptualisation and operation, something that is compounded by the fact that many are set in particularly demanding contexts. However,



Intehape-hape Akshya Early Childhood Project (Australia)  
My family





Child Labour and Resilience (Bolivia)  
 Threshing wheat  
 Photo: Edwin Milan Arias

as Robert Myers points out there are many potential advantages in environments that may be labelled 'disadvantaged' or that are set in complicated contexts; something that clearly applies in the disadvantaged indigenous or cultural communities that feature in these case studies. These advantages include:

- multiple caretaking, by adults and older siblings, provides an opportunity for children to learn from several people.
- Opportunities for learning through participation in work and ritual activity.
- An environment providing space and many local materials that can be used for learning.
- A rich cultural heritage of toys, games, songs and stories that can provide a basis for learning.
- Training in language comprehension and sensitivity to non-verbal signs.
- Emphasis on social solidarity and harmony, and physical and emotional ties.\*

\*Myers R (1992) *The twelve who survive - strengthening programmes of early childhood development in the Third World*; Routledge, London/New York.

The work and achievements of some of the projects featured in this article have been recorded in the Foundation's Working Papers in ECD and the ECD Practice and Reflections series. A publications list and order form is enclosed with this edition of *Early Childhood Matters* or is available from the Foundation at the address shown on the inside and back covers.

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## Language and culture

language is one of the basic elements of a community and sustains a culture. It is, therefore, one of the key projects of many ethnic and racial groups.

However, the ways in which projects deal with the relationship between minority and majority languages

are diverse. According to a study by the European Commission, there are three main types of project:

1. *Language maintenance* - projects which aim to maintain the language of a community in the face of a dominant language.

2. *Language acquisition* - projects which aim to help a community acquire a new language.

3. *Language transition* - projects which aim to help a community transition from one language to another.

4. *Language contact* - projects which aim to help a community develop a new language from the contact of two or more languages.

5. *Language change* - projects which aim to help a community change its language.

6. *Language revitalization* - projects which aim to help a community revive a language that has become extinct or nearly extinct.

7. *Language preservation* - projects which aim to help a community preserve a language that is in danger of disappearing.

8. *Language documentation* - projects which aim to help a community document its language.

9. *Language research* - projects which aim to help a community research its language.

10. *Language education* - projects which aim to help a community educate its children in its language.

11. *Language media* - projects which aim to help a community develop media in its language.

12. *Language arts* - projects which aim to help a community develop arts in its language.

13. *Language history* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's history.

14. *Language geography* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's geography.

15. *Language linguistics* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's linguistics.

16. *Language literature* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's literature.

17. *Language music* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's music.

18. *Language dance* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's dance.

19. *Language theater* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's theater.

20. *Language film* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's film.

21. *Language television* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's television.

22. *Language radio* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's radio.

23. *Language internet* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's internet.

24. *Language mobile phone* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's mobile phone.

25. *Language video* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's video.

26. *Language computer* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's computer.

27. *Language database* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's database.

28. *Language website* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's website.

29. *Language email* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's email.

30. *Language social media* - projects which aim to help a community learn about its language's social media.

## The goals of bilingualism or multilingualism

There are many reasons why people want to be bilingual or multilingual. Some of the most common reasons are:

1. *Communication* - being able to communicate with people from different cultures.

2. *Education* - being able to learn in one's own language.

3. *Work* - being able to work in a bilingual or multilingual environment.

4. *Travel* - being able to travel to different countries.

5. *Identity* - being able to maintain one's cultural identity.

6. *Health* - being able to understand medical instructions.

7. *Law* - being able to understand legal documents.

8. *Business* - being able to do business with people from different cultures.

9. *Science* - being able to understand scientific research.

10. *Art* - being able to understand art from different cultures.

11. *History* - being able to understand history from different cultures.

12. *Geography* - being able to understand geography from different cultures.

13. *Politics* - being able to understand politics from different cultures.

14. *Religion* - being able to understand religion from different cultures.

15. *Philosophy* - being able to understand philosophy from different cultures.

16. *Psychology* - being able to understand psychology from different cultures.

17. *Sociology* - being able to understand sociology from different cultures.

18. *Anthropology* - being able to understand anthropology from different cultures.

19. *Archaeology* - being able to understand archaeology from different cultures.



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# Samenspel:

## *playing/taking action together*

Roel Copier and Marinde Hurenkamp

*The Samenspel Op Maat organisation in The Netherlands promotes group-oriented work with children and their parents. It focuses on development stimulation for children and educational support for parents. The organisation's goal is both the prevention of development delays and the improvement of developmental opportunities for families in vulnerable situations. It operates the Samenspel project that has developed a methodology for work with children and their parents in disadvantaged situations that allows the development of context specific, flexible programmes. It is because of this that it is successful with cultural or ethnic communities – Moroccan, Turkish, Dutch and so on – and with multicultural groups as well.*

Parents (mostly women) and young children engage in play activities under experienced guidance in small weekly playgroups. The pre-school play-leaders who work with them are supplied with a set of guidelines and a structure so they can generate activities that will support the development of young children. A real connection with

the daily lives of the parents and children is essential and it is the responsibility of the playleaders to discover what is wanted and to make sure that it happens. In this way, the programme is always linked to the actual, everyday questions, needs and problems of parents and children.

One striking feature of the Samenspel approach is that, although it is used with families from a number of different countries, it does not prescribe particular approaches for particular cultural groups – there isn't a 'Turkish' approach, or a 'Moroccan' approach or a 'Dutch' approach. Instead, the approach to any group

depends on discovering who the people are who make up the group, and on finding out from those people what they want and need. That might mean that work actually does start with playgroups made up of people from just one country. But that may simply be because the women in these groups are emerging from their homes for the





Samenspel (The Netherlands)  
Photo: Ruud Peijnenburg

first time and need a safe and familiar environment. Thereafter, the Samenspel approach allows things to evolve naturally. For example, those same women may soon want to become members of a multicultural group.

One core principle of the Samenspel approach is experiential learning: everyone has an innate ability to learn so Samenspel creates possibilities for exploration, experimentation, watching and learning. At the same time, parents are offered educational support and information. A second core principle is the recognition that parents possess an expertise and strength of their own that should be recognised, valued and stimulated.

The starting point is always meeting the needs of parents and children, while the thread that links everything together is stimulating development.

#### Creative playleaders

Two playleaders supervise each Samenspel playgroup for migrant families – one is Dutch speaking, the other speaks the mother tongue of the parents and children. It is essential that participants can identify with a

playleader with the same cultural background. In many cases the working language of the playgroup is the mother tongue. However, this is complemented with opportunities for children to pick up some Dutch: for example, a song may be sung in the original language and then repeated in Dutch. In general, playleaders and mothers constantly work together to find the right ways forward in all areas of the playgroup activities. Samenspel playleaders have creativity, flexibility and expertise; and Samenspel believes that these count for much more than any number of certificates.

A number of mothers who started out as Samenspel participants have become playleaders of new Samenspel playgroups; and, in general, Samenspel often functions as a starting point for women to explore their own possibilities. They may move on to basic adult education and later, on to further vocational courses. In other words, they break through their isolation.

#### Key aspects of the Samenspel approach

While it is possible to list key aspects of the Samenspel approach, this does not convey the sense of the whole experience. However, these are some of the most important elements.

- Meticulous research on the cultural background was a first step.
- Total respect for differences and diversity, cultural identity, the mother tongue and the Dutch language.
- The concept is simple but there is flexibility to meet the needs of the parents and the children.
- Essential connections are made between people and their daily lives, needs and questions.
- Parents are taken seriously.
- There is no 'top-down' learning – and learning is by doing.
- Mothers and children are always involved together.
- The approach is 'tailor-made' for any situation.
- There is close and caring interaction between mothers, children and playleaders.
- The playgroups include multicultural toys, food and festivities.
- Special attention is paid to language acquisition, socio-emotional skills and self-reliance, and to learning to recognise and associate with the things around you (environmental awareness).
- Special attention is given to the multicultural diversity of Dutch society. Instead of one-off presentations of the exotic or of differences between cultures, the emphasis is on the fact that the presence of other cultures is a natural, permanent part of the environment.
- There is constant reflection on what is happening.

#### Does it work?

Samenspel reaches the parents and children that other pre-school provisions do not: that alone is one solid measure of effectiveness. On the day to day level, effectiveness can be related to the enthusiasm shown by the mothers and children. In quantitative terms, the number of mothers and children attending the playgroups continues to increase; there is a growing demand for more playgroups; and the centres have reached their maximum capacity.

Samenspel (The Netherlands)  
Photo: Rued Feinertburg



“ If you take working with parents seriously, then what you do largely depends on them. It makes no sense to force something upon parents that does not affect them: people will not respond to developments in their neighbourhood if they feel detached from them. ”



Samenspel (The Netherlands)  
Photo: Ruud Pajenburg

Playgroups are seen as a vehicle for development and the effectiveness of Samenspel's playgroups can be seen in the reactions in the formal primary school sector. 'Samenspel children' are readily identified because they feel more at ease, speak out more frequently and keep pace with the curriculum.

Parents speak of 'a world opening up to them'. They say that participating in the playgroups makes them more confident, that they have become aware that 'they themselves are not doing badly at all.' They say they have seen their children become more sociable and self-reliant; and that they have learned more about how they can further stimulate the development of their children themselves. They also communicate better with teachers because they have become used to consulting with playleaders about their children.

The project observes that, as mothers develop confidence in Samenspel, they also develop more confidence themselves and show this in a number of ways. For example, they tend to also talk with each other about additional subjects that are of interest to them. Self-initiated mutual contact improves: women living in the same neighbourhood get to know each other and sometimes make joint efforts to break through their isolated lives. They begin to feel more at home in their neighbourhood and often become more active socially. ○

## The organic way

Marion de Hurenkamp

Most of the work that I did was based on the records that the Foundation has. While these are extensive and highly informative, they are limited in the sense that they seldom convey the feel of the project, the particularity of its day-to-day work, and the nuances of the working, social, emotional and development environments that it generates and sustains. It is only by actually spending time with a project that I could gain some real insights into what is going on and about the value of this for all those who are participating.

I was able to visit one of the centres operated by the Samenspel project in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. One meaning of Samenspel is 'playing together' and that is what I went to experience: mothers and children of Turkish origin playing together. Before I went, I asked the Programme Specialist in the Foundation who is responsible for The Netherlands: 'What would you say is multicultural in Samenspel?' She was a little surprised and she didn't know how to answer. When I visited the centre, I saw and also sensed what was going on, and then I understood

why she couldn't answer my question: the question was inappropriate because the setting, the activities and the feel of the centre are multicultural in themselves. Multiculturalism is an organic part of the centre. Culturally relevant approaches are not added on, or expressed separately, or given special individual emphasis. You can't make a list of them and understand what Samenspel is about just by reading the list. But you know what it is when you see them expressing and manifesting themselves in the interactions and ultimate atmosphere that you experience.

One of the Turkish mothers there told me that she had moved from Turkey to Germany when she was five or six years old. Her mother did not speak any German so there she was, a small girl, having to learn how to cope for herself within a strange society. Now she lives in The Netherlands, and is using that sort of experience and building on it in her work with children. It was such a good experience talking to her, not just because of her story, but also because she was dressed traditionally while her two young daughters were dressed like two of the Spice Girls (a singing group popular in some countries).

“

*Actually Samenspel is a movement, a dynamic,  
a philosophy, a method.*

*It is not a certain project but a whole way of thinking  
and acting and reacting.*

”

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Samenspel (The Netherlands)  
Photo: Ruud Peijnenburg





*Sesame Street: Kids for peace (Israel, Palestinian Autonomous Region)  
Special puppets made for these special programmes*

*And a young child shall  
lead them*

## *Sesame Street: Kids for Peace project*

*The Sesame Street: Kids for Peace project is a new member of the famous Sesame Street family of educational television programmes for young children. It has been developed for Palestinian children in the Palestinian Autonomous Region, and Jewish and Arabic children in Israel, to counter the messages of division and confrontation that they receive every day. The project was inspired by the 1993 handshake at the White House in Washington, USA, between the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and the then Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin. It is a joint venture between the Children's Television Workshop (CTW) New York, USA, Israeli Educational Television, and the Institute of Modern Media of the Al-Quds University, Jerusalem. This article reviews the complexities involved in producing programmes for young children that can effectively promote mutual respect and understanding.*

The project's full title includes 'And a young child shall lead them' – something that catches the sense and purpose of Sesame Street (Rechov Sumsum in Hebrew, Shara'a Sumsum in Arabic). Its objectives are:

- to teach children in a violence stricken region mutual respect and understanding, and conflict resolution and;
- to address the cognitive, affective and social needs of Israeli-Jewish, Israeli-Palestinian and Palestinian children.

The main target audiences are Israeli-Jewish, Israeli-Palestinian and Palestinian pre-school children aged three to seven and their families, in their homes and kindergartens. However, the programme makers hope to reach older children.

There are four major components in the project of which the core element is a total of 70 half hour, bilingual programmes. These have newly developed characters, puppets, street scenes, live action segments and animation to develop respect and understanding of difference. There are also specially developed books, games, and teaching materials in Arabic and Hebrew.

As well as the very obvious need to work with young children who live in such culturally divided

and violent contexts, the rationale for these programmes derives from research that shows that stereotypes of Palestinian and Israeli children are formulated at a very young age. One study reveals that by the age of six, a majority of Jewish children have a negative conceptualisation of Palestinian children. As children aged from two and a half to three and a half years old begin to use the word 'Arab' they are still neutral in their ideas about Palestinians. Soon, however information coming from their environments shapes their ideas and they develop negative views.\* A similar situation is held to be true of Palestinian children as well.

#### Culturally relevant dynamics in the preparation process

CTW was established in 1969 with the then revolutionary idea that television could be used as a tool for educating children throughout the USA. Since then, it has accumulated a



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huge body of experience in making entertaining educational programmes in a wide variety of countries. Each is developed to be appropriate for the contexts that its viewers live in.

As happens in all Sesame Street productions, this project involved a strong group of local advisors and

multidisciplinary resource persons in workshops and seminars. The group included both Israelis and Palestinians: educators, writers and illustrators of children's books, musicians, animators, and specialists in pedagogy, psychology, sociology and communication. Effectively they were the voice of the child, helping the production team to

keep a child-centred focus; and they covered such curriculum issues as language, moral values, children's self image, stereotyped beliefs, and methods of bringing about change. Specific contributions related to the characteristics and needs of children in the various target groups. These included: health and nutrition;

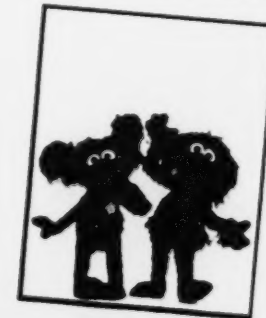
democratic education in the family and in interpersonal relations; cognitive and social-emotional expression; conflict resolution; stereotypes and prejudice; the collective psychological barrier between Israelis and Palestinians; and trust and confidence in adults.



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## Rehov Sumsum/ Shara'a Sumsum

CURRICULUM DOCUMENT



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Mothers and children aged three to seven were consulted in group sessions about their favourite activities, about television viewing patterns and about the roles of mothers in supervising television viewing. Among many other data, this revealed that Palestinian mothers prefer television to be in Arabic rather than other languages, prefer the use of everyday, simple Arabic to classical Arabic, show high interest in segments about Israeli children; and demonstrate awareness of the programme's educational messages.

Generally, Palestinians also concluded that their children view unsuitable

television programmes, and that they must invest in educationally sound and stimulating programmes, given that television is such a major influence in children's lives.

*Building on what is shared, and understanding and respecting difference*

The initial stages of this project were tense, with a range of concerns that had to be resolved. For example, in terms of co-operation, there were questions about who would really have the decision making power, and worries about being seen as

collaborators who would be coerced into unacceptable positions. In terms of the content, some people were afraid of presenting a utopian, over-idealistic series that was not sufficiently based in reality. They questioned the themes of mutual respect and understanding when so much in the children's environments pointed to violent division and intolerance. In terms of contentiousness, there was concern about dealing with issues that raise particular intergroup tensions.

The suggested solution was to stay clear of images and material that stressed division and conflict, and to focus

instead on contexts in which Israeli Jewish and Arab, as well as Palestinian children or adults do intermingle. That includes a focus on what children share: family; emotions; games; the desire for peace; living; eating; sleeping; playing; learning and loving side by side. In practical terms, the approach was to be safe and non-political, looking through the eyes of a four year old, stressing similarities and pointing up differences so that these can be understood and respected. Children are shown the traditions, ancestors and history that they share; and their cultural and religious similarities. Differences range from foods to





holidays. Messages of understanding and respect have to be transmitted through these sorts of processes: it is only by strengthening children's national and cultural identities that they can be expected to understand and be tolerant of another culture.

However, it is also necessary to avoid generalisation. Nuances and details about people are very important and the aim is to portray the whole range of characters that exist in each community. There are differences between subgroups within each cultural group, and these include urban, rural or camp settings; socio-economic, educational and cultural levels; and language differences.

The Israelis and the Palestinians have their own street in the series: each is distinct and autonomous, and the characters come to one street or the other. There is no attempt to engineer an artificially mixed context. This device also avoids the problems of devising a third setting in which the two sides could meet freely; or of having a token or stereotypical presence by one side or the other.

#### Language issues

Each Sesame Street: Kids For Peace programme is bilingual, being comprised of segments in both Arabic and Hebrew. Naturally the Hebrew programmes contain more Hebrew than Arabic and vice versa; while each also contains 'cross-over segments' – parts in which characters who live in one of the streets visit their friends in the other.

Language is the best door into any culture – it can almost guarantee a great deal of understanding. But many other issues also arose. For example, it was felt that Palestinians were losing their capacity to express themselves adequately and fluently in Arabic – especially the Israeli Arabs, for whom Hebrew was becoming the dominant language, something that might undermine their cultural heritage. The importance of Arabic to Palestinians therefore had to be asserted.

Making a bilingual programme for three to seven year olds presented problems. For example, subtitles were useless: young children cannot read

them. However, researchers identified some 3,000 elements that the two languages share. These include sounds, phrases and greetings, and words for numbers, body parts and some household items. By accentuating some of these, it was felt that the series could do a great deal to





introduce children to simple elements of each other's language and to help mutual respect and understanding.

The programmes ... and reactions to them

The first programme was broadcast on 1 April 1998 on Israel Educational Television's (IETV) Second Channel. It was broadcast throughout Israel and parts of the Palestinian Autonomous Region. It was 30 minutes long and consisted of segments produced by IETV, Al-Quds University's Institute of Modern Media, and some CTW segments that had been dubbed into

Hebrew and Arabic. On the same day, the first edition of a Palestinian version of the programme was premiered on Al-Quds Educational Television. This was 15 minutes long, and included segments produced by all three participating organisations. Each of the remaining programmes in this series – 20 in all – were broadcast three times a week to six major Palestinian cities.

Meanwhile, IETV went on to broadcast 15 programmes in a two-week period following the 1 April premiere and, following the summer break, broadcast the remaining programmes at the rate of one per day. Further broadcasting schedules include timings that suit targeted audiences such as kindergarten teachers as they work with young children.

A summative evaluation of the entire project has started and will continue through 22 weeks. Among other goals, it will determine the programme's effectiveness in teaching the original educational goals; and examine children's exposure to the programmes.

Anecdotal responses to the programmes have been very positive: children are watching them, enjoying them and learning from them.

\* Lazar M and Spyer A (1995)  
*A summary of selected research and programmes: dealing with stereotypes and specifically stereotypes of Arab and Israeli Jewish pre-school children in Israel.*

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Africa Community Publishing and Development Trust  
Child researchers  
Photo: Joanne Currie

# Zimbabwe

## *The new community publishing*

Kathy Bond-Stewart

*Kathy Bond-Stewart is a writer and coordinator with the Africa Community Publishing and Development Trust (ACPDT), a non-profit trust with a national network in all 58 districts in Zimbabwe. It has expertise in participatory development training, in research and in the production of training materials, and specialises in a range of development activities modestly grouped under the title of 'community publishing'. Put very simply, this is a combination of two concepts 'community development' and 'publishing' that builds the skills, confidence and creativity of community activists, by involving them in the collective production and distribution of publications and materials. However, it is much more complex and profound than that.*

*In this article, Kathy Bond-Stewart discusses the Chiyubunuzyo Programme with the Tonga people of Zimbabwe who were displaced from their traditional lands by a dam building scheme. They were moved to the centre of a game reserve, thus exposing them to dangerous wild animals ... and to tourists. The government of Zimbabwe has worked out an integrated development programme for them, in collaboration with a number of development agencies. ACPDT has been helping the Tongas to build up to a level of organisation that will allow them to negotiate for full participation in all aspects of this development plan. Similar processes also enabled Tonga people to negotiate the nature of their pre-school provision. For this they worked in partnership with the Federation of Kushanda Pre-schools.*



## The Chiyubunuzyo Programme

Chiyubunuzyo means 'Revelation' and the Chiyubunuzyo Programme is about revealing what people can do. It aims to transform poverty into prosperity in a remote and very poor area of Zimbabwe, through an integrated economic, environmental, social and organisational development process. One of its main strategies is community based research and writing, and the stimulation of all forms of creativity. It has designed and facilitated a leadership programme for Chiyubunuzyo. The idea was to build a new young leadership drawn from the lowest income groups, with a majority of women participants. The nature and spirit of that training, and indeed of Chiyubunuzyo, is caught by a poem that is based on the evaluation comments of participants in the leadership programme:

Chiyubunuzyo is a revelation  
that has opened our eyes to the  
possibilities of change. It has  
shown us that we are not  
helpless, and that we can  
make a difference to our  
lives and to the lives of others.

Chiyubunuzyo is a revelation  
that has opened our eyes to the  
possibilities of change. It has  
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that has opened our eyes to the  
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shown us that we are not  
helpless, and that we can  
make a difference to our  
lives and to the lives of others.

### The setting

The general context in which we operate changed very much from the 1980s to the 1990s. A lot more people are experiencing very deep poverty, and structural adjustment is a major factor here now. Basically many of the hopes and dreams that people had fought for during the struggle for independence were lost and many citizens retreated into passivity – a sort of quiet despair. There is also a general cynicism about even NGOs, churches, and so on. It's much more difficult to work for change when people have already been through a process of change that has betrayed their hopes. However, there is a government policy and a programme for poverty reduction which at least is a recognition of the problem; and there is quite a lot of support from other agencies in dealing with poverty. There is also a general interest in capacity building, especially of local government.

We've discovered that the more marginalised and oppressed people have been, the stronger the potential for them to be really creative and

energetic and motivated afterwards. That's very hopeful. I think any human being in any situation, if given the right encouragement, can do far more than we can imagine. As an example of this, I can talk about the Chiyubunuzyo Programme that operates in the area of the worst poverty in Zimbabwe. The people there have been moved to make way for a lake, have had a very painful history and have been marginalised as a minority ethnic group. This actually made their motivation and determination very strong. Another factor is that, because they are overwhelmingly Tonga, they have a kind of gentleness which is very impressive, and which is not passivity, but a peaceful approach with real strength and determination behind it. That's been good, because we are very interested in encouraging non-violent ways of handling conflicts. I can imagine that if harder people had gone through the experiences the Tonga went through they would have become violent. There was every provocation because they survived very difficult circumstances.

#### The community publishing way

Community publishing as a methodology, is based profoundly on working creatively with the reality which is there. Everything is deeply influenced by the local situation. With this Tonga group, it was very important to encourage cultural wisdom and tradition and to promote the language, especially because people were very angry about their culture and language not being recognised. And there's no way that we could have done anything in the area without trying very hard to explore and encourage the best of what was there.

It's very important that local people lead themselves, teach themselves and organise themselves; and it's important that we, as a service organisation, don't hang on to the control and that communication is completely two-way, with both parties free to challenge each other on anything. So, although there's really widespread knowledge now that development programmes shouldn't be imposed and that local people should be consulted, it is actually very challenging to make that real.

Another important attitude is honesty, even when it's quite painful or embarrassing. And we also like to encourage the people that we work with to have, express and share healthy doubts. And to use, give and receive criticism constructively. It's a very honest atmosphere. I think that's very important.

#### Approaches and processes that work and those that don't

For me as a development worker, it's extremely important in this kind of work to have a deep humility and openness, as well as a willingness to be deeply challenged and changed oneself, to be really turned upside down. A lot of people in Africa work in development for money. It's a multimillion dollar business. And even when they have rejected those temptations, sometimes they get a lot of power out of making huge decisions that affect millions of people. Often the attitude of agencies coming in – that they're highly educated specialists – is incredibly dehumanising. It absolutely shatters people's confidence. But it's so subtle. It's not just in how workers

consciously carry it out, it's also in how people sit, how they talk, how they travel, where they stay. There are all sorts of subtle controls and signs of superiority which local people find extremely discouraging, so they just close up or put on a different face and pretend to do it or just withdraw. So it's essential to come in with complete respect and openness, and to be able to completely hand over control of a process to local people.

At the practical level, you can't just take one approach and use it all over the country. You have to take a very specific and local approach. On the other hand, from the very beginning we like to work with a sense of doing something which is significant to the country as a whole and which we hope will have some significance internationally.

In the processes we have developed in the Chiyubunuzyo Programme, we have combined writing, research and organising. When people first expressed who they were, their stories and images were very painful and so despairing. But when we probed a bit further we

discovered that underneath there's a basic toughness that helps them to survive almost impossible situations. And gradually, through the whole process of stimulating people intellectually and giving them a new sense of themselves, they developed a strong confidence in their own abilities and discovered their own creativity. Having done that, there's very little work which we need to do to support the whole process of change. It's simply designing a framework that offers really strong support.

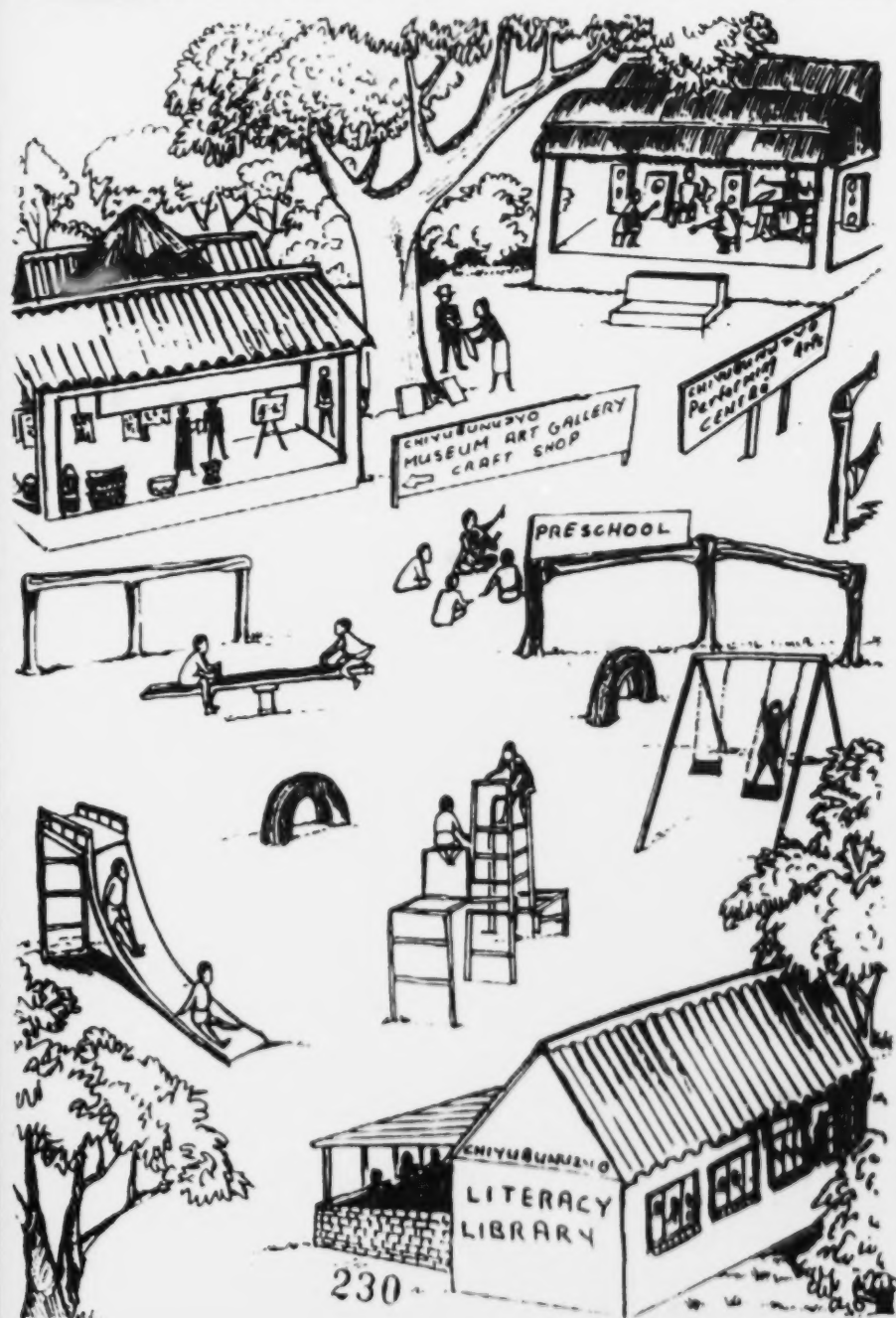
But it doesn't just happen. It's not simple to get everyone in a village to participate. We don't just start with a blank slate and ask 'What do you feel like doing and how do you feel like doing it?' I think that quite often creative initiatives are very weak on the organisational side. It is very important to combine developing strong creativity and intellectual skills, with a very strong organisational base. We have very strong principles and very detailed participatory organisational methods that we transfer to those we work with to make sure we get the quality of participation and change that we're

looking for. We encourage people to do their own workshops and train themselves, but they are highly structured workshops. That way, we teach people democratic ways of working which are effective. And practical skills: how to motivate people, how to build trust, communicate, run a meeting which actually achieves a purpose, do the kind of research which leads to change. I think these skills are very rare, although in a way they're very basic. Even people with far more education in Zimbabwe often lack many of these skills. So the combination of stimulating creativity and stimulating people intellectually at the same time as giving people strong organisational tools, is particularly useful.

For the last year we've been testing everything we know in extremely impoverished villages. What's happened is that our initial instincts have become strong convictions. When we developed our form of publishing as a tool for change we didn't realise why it was so important to begin with people's minds. It was only when we studied poverty deeply that we realised that the worst effect of it is inside people and in their self-image and relationships. So the best possible starting point is to work with people intellectually, to work with the human







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spirit. One of the things we are setting up through a sister organisation, Africa Books Development Trust, is libraries in each village, so that people have information on whatever is their interest. We have a whole range, from novels to very practical 'how to' books, because they have very broad reading interests.

#### Working with women and young children

Although we haven't been working in a very specialised way with children at all, we want to do a lot more work with them in the future. In 1995 we carried out a study of community views on poverty with research assistants from a background of poverty. From this, it is very clear that children and the very old bear the worst brunt of poverty. So any real work to tackle poverty has to recognise and support children, and give them a central role. Participants in our programmes may develop into future leaders. They may be young parents. You see all the women in the programme with their toddlers around them. Babies are so visible at our meetings. All we have to do, in an organised way, is stimulate and support those look after babies to stimulate children before they go to pre-school, so that the support of young children doesn't become just something at pre-school. It must be much wider.

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## Collecting Stories

Awawaa mpole, wayinda  
muzilowa  
Awa ndapola - wayinda  
muzilowa



Breaking up for the antelope to pass.

In the Muzilowa, a village in the north-east of Malawi, the people are known for their traditional dance. The dance is a form of social organisation and is a way of life. It is a way of life that is based on the traditional dance. The dance is a form of social organisation and is a way of life. It is a way of life that is based on the traditional dance. The dance is a form of social organisation and is a way of life. It is a way of life that is based on the traditional dance.

When we look at children in the villages, we want to begin with the relationships and families they are born into; how children are planned, thought about even before birth. And the conditions of birth: there are no maternity facilities for hundreds of kilometres and women died because facilities are inadequate. Any complications means that women would have to walk a long way because bus stops are very far, and use a lot of money to go on a journey over a hundred kilometres. Can you imagine women with a complicated labour, having the money, even being able to go that distance?

Fortunately, through writing, researching and organising about the issues, people are getting maternity facilities at a new clinic in a nearby village. It seems that with a lot of organisation and documentation, people can claim improved health services and get what they need. It is just not automatic, they have to work for these things.

In the Chiyubunuzyo Programme, we plan to work with babyminders and families. We want to look at the place of the child in the family and - in the pre-schools - we want to bring grandmothers in by pairing them with the trained teachers. The people in these

villages are very concerned about the situation of children and so they have done their own survey and report on that. And again we were very moved because in the children's survey that they did – with very small children, often literally naked, under-nourished and out of school – they were so articulate about their situation. They often used very creative images to express things, like: 'Going to school would be like visiting the moon.' We are also building a lot of research and documentation into the development of schools, and will, hopefully, transform the existing schools in the future.

Another survey and report has been done by participants in the Chiyubunuzyo Programme, on children in difficult circumstances. This includes every child in 12 villages who is out of school, orphaned, disabled or abused. A special programme is being planned for these children. We're complete beginners in working with children but we'll be looking at the child very broadly. Children are very central in terms of what we believe in and we guess that children are far more capable than anyone imagines them to be. Working seriously with children in a context where they are highly valued will be very exciting.

Africa Community Publishing and Development Trust (Zimbabwe)  
A story-telling session  
Photo: Fiona McDougall/One world Photo



Kalungu-kalungu takagumi  
ansi, kalungu-kalungu  
takagumi ansi.



Participants using each a hand to carry a  
colleague.

Africa Community Publishing and Development Trust (Zimbabwe)  
What community research reveals

Volokoto nibaalumi  
matayisiki chigolonti insima  
yangu.



My husband does not leave any maize cobs for  
food.

#### Community-based research

Community-based research is carried out by the village people and it looks at all aspects of life. We don't give them any deep training, only a continuous very light guidance in research and writing, and very simple frameworks as starting points for their research. Parents, for instance, might be interested in the lack of health and education services. Then there are questions about the realities for children in very difficult circumstances; and the place of the child in the family and in relationships. It's very funny because some men talk very elaborately about children as their treasure, and then the research uncovers the fact that they have maybe spent two minutes in the last six months playing with their own children. A very crucial point is for the researchers to respect children as the most important informants, and even encourage very young children to give information. They have to start with building trust through play, and then get children into expressing their views in drawings or just chatting. Village researchers get quite startled when tiny children – often three year olds – turn out to be so vocal and articulate in expressing themselves.

For work on two reports on young children in communal and farming areas, village researchers knew about children but were new to research. We matched them with experienced community publishing researchers for experiential learning. Then we got them to do a third report with only minor guidance, so they could prove to themselves that they could do it. We have also enabled another study, this time on children in mining communities. The words, drawings and statements of the young children there were so moving that even hardened managers from international companies started doing things to improve the situation even before the research was finished and published. It's delightful how forceful that can be and how it can really motivate agencies to wake up and do something quickly.

#### *What people build on*

In the areas where we work, people only have their collective strength and their individual talents. Community publishing processes somehow really challenge individuals and really encourage the uniqueness of each individual. There's also a lot of collective support. Getting back to context – temporal context you might call it – if you look at the twentieth century, there's been a mindless collectivism that swamps our individual uniqueness and, at the same time, there's been

a sort of very insane individualism that has completely forgotten about collective concerns. Our approach tries to balance these and I'm always delighted that, in a movement of a few hundred people, each person is such a definite and unique individual. You get to know them as completely different strong individuals, but collectively very supportive of each other.

The intelligence, creativity and energy of the village people make it hard for us to keep up: basically, we are running after the people who we are meant to be supporting. We believe that children's abilities are also astonishing and we look forward to involving children of all ages in community publishing. Although it's been difficult because the material situation is terrible, it's been a much more joyful process than we'd ever anticipated. I think it's very important for people to know that: this kind of work is difficult, challenging and risky, but it's very joyful.

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*Publications from ACPI*





Early Learning Resource Unit (Republic of South Africa)  
*Kabekao Playgroup*



# South Africa

## Motivating in challenging contexts

Freda Brock

The Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU), was established with Foundation support in 1978 and became one of the most prominent agencies in early childhood development (ECD) in South Africa. Its principal target groups are parents, caregivers, trainers and non formal pre-school teachers in townships and informal settlements; and ELRU aims to support initiatives that are created by the people themselves. However, it recognised that its approaches and programmes were not working well in some poor, violent, multiracial communities.

Since the early eighties it has therefore been developing an idea that is wholly relevant to such contexts – in fact one that has

been fashioned specially for these communities. It is called the Community Motivators programme. Community Motivators are people from the communities who start from whatever is there – which often means almost nothing in the way of development structures and resources. They give direct support to families, often on a one-to-one basis, and are also trained to network and link people with the fragmented services and resources that exist for children and families.

Freda Brock joined ELRU in November 1994 as Director, with overall responsibility for ELRU's programmes, and special responsibility for team building and fundraising.

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*There are positive elements as well. For example, despite the fact that families have been displaced, with the father living in one place and the mother in another, the sense of family is still very strong.*

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#### The communities and their characteristics

In developing the Community Motivators programmes, we chose to work in four communities that were particularly challenging. Three are informal settlements with predominantly 'African' populations; while one is a sub economic housing estate with a 'Coloured' population.\* There's a mix of people in the informal settlements – mostly South Africans, with many migrating to the region from the Transkei and Ciskei in search of work and a better life. Many come from other African countries.

Different kinds of dynamics prevail in each, including political conflicts and conflicts about resources. For example NGOs are generally perceived by people in those areas as being financed by international funders, by the government or local companies. Certain people set themselves up as the gatekeepers, and there are issues about turf (territory). You might find a civic organisation in an area that said 'We know what the needs are in this community; why are you using the

money to benefit this particular group? And who gave permission for your organisation to work in this area?' The process of negotiating and renegotiating the right to be in a community is a sensitive and time-consuming one.

Violence is a huge factor. Powerful political, civic, gang or economically driven groupings and structures within communities are often in conflict with one another. There is also a high rate of domestic violence. So violence is very much a feature and it is why a very high level of trauma exists within communities.

But there are positive elements as well. For example, despite the fact that families have been displaced, with the father living in one place and the mother in another, the sense of family is still very strong. In most cases the family is an extended one, involving a number of relatives who live far apart and who can be involved in rearing a child. There are, however, other problems for the child who is moved about to different caregivers, often missing out on key supports such as the immunisation programmes or school enrolment.

Another very positive factor is that possibilities for income-generation and gainful employment are developing. People also take the initiative to make a living. But there are limits to the resources and to the strength that is there: great numbers of people are struggling to survive poverty.

#### The Community Motivators

To offer support or to bring about change in these complex environments and circumstances is very difficult. Whatever you do has to be accepted by the community. It also has to make sense to the other formal and informal structures that exist there – that means either working with them to maximise the benefit, or at least working with their understanding. There is also the question of who is most qualified or most appropriate to work in these communities; who will be accepted and trusted. For us, it has to be local people, the sort of people who we call Community Motivators.

But you don't just come across people like these. There needs to be a lot of groundwork in each community. We

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Early Learning Resource Unit (Republic of South Africa)  
Community Motivator at work, Brown's Farm

## Working in the Nyanga Hostels

These hostels were originally meant for single men but whole families live here in extremely overcrowded and poverty-stricken conditions. Working in the passages, Zoleka and Babole, the ~~three~~ <sup>two</sup> Motivators, working with Isca Kabia, the Community Motivator, first informed the people who live there about the activities that they are invited to do with their children during home visits.

They also taught the parents about learning opportunities for children in the home setting and showed them other things that are available so home visit parents can use to help their children develop. The parents ~~learned~~ <sup>learned</sup> that they can't just sit but instead can involve their children in their work and teach them the names of things. They also mentioned that the children could develop through this involvement by identifying colours, shapes and sizes and also learn to follow instructions. The mothers showed interest and went on to learn about making toys out of scraps.

The children could also hear the Community Motivators when they were visiting other homes and would call out: "Here is our Sisi (mother) and we are going to play and she is going to show us how to write." Activities with blocks, cutting and pasting and also outdoor activities followed. One mother informed them that: "Since you have started this programme of visiting us, life became so easy in this house. My children pick up things like old tins, papers, and sponges that they see in the yard and they ask me to keep it for Sisi when she comes to play with us so that we can have more toys to play with. This also keeps my yard clean."

During these visits they gave some mothers homework to do with their children so that the next time when they come to visit, the mother would give a report of how she helped her child with the homework. One of the parents in the hostel wanted to stop her child from joining the group. But her child told her that she wanted to join in because she had never gone to creche. The mother allowed her to go, and also started to gain interest herself.

work with existing local organisations to help people carry out a kind of survey, produce a profile of the area, canvas opinions, and spread awareness of the need for, and options for ECD. This includes looking at what exists already and looking at points that can be strengthened. One approach is through organising a series of talks about nutrition and health; another is through door to door visiting. It's a matter of getting people's interest and then beginning to identify those people who are interested in developing some sort of work with children. After this, at a public meeting, criteria are developed for Community Motivators and names are put forward. Some people may have volunteered or have been identified by

the community, and there is an election at the meeting and the chosen person comes to ELRU for training.

However, Community Motivators are employed by local organisations that supervise them and ultimately take responsibility for the project. These organisations vary in nature. One of the projects is overseen by an organisation that specialises in child welfare. Another ECD organisation saw this initiative as an extension of its own work and took responsibility for Community Motivators in its area. In another community, a church organisation put up a committee with a group of parents to supervise and administer the funds and to give



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Early Learning Resource Unit  
(Republic of South Africa)  
*Making use of Granny's skills and knowledge*

### Training needs

working. There is also some training in management where relevant.

Coping with violence is an important area that also requires preparation and training for the Community Motivators. They have to learn skills in helping people to deal with trauma, and in building resilience more broadly than at the personal level. They also need to develop strategies to help people make progress at community level. This might mean facilitating a collective consciousness of what their rights to security are, and what children's rights are. This could lead to helping people develop and use links to other resource organisations.

ELRU trains people from all parts of the country to be Community Motivators in their own areas. Some have come from other countries in Southern Africa. We offer them a

## Gauging impact

support and monitoring programme afterwards, keep in touch with them and help them develop networks for support. The strategy that we have developed has worked very well in some areas, but in others work has been difficult, often because of violence and political strife, but also because more intensive support is needed than we are able to give at present. We are working on ways to increase our capacity in this regard.

### How Community Motivators are perceived and received

As for the kind of reception that Community Motivators get when they approach families, we have case studies from the four areas and these include what families think about them. They included comments that showed that some people are much more concerned with having food on the table for their child, while others seized the opportunity to play a part in their children's education and welcomed the resultant opportunities for personal development.

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I've also seen the sort of work that a Community Motivator does. Perhaps I have only seen responsive parents in the projects, but there does seem to be quite a level of anticipation and excitement on receiving a visit at home. Not everything always works well. In one of the settlements we are presently involved in a process of changing the basic approach. Instead of having one Community Motivator, the people have decided to have a group of women who

are going to take on the role. This is a positive step toward developing a model more appropriate to local needs. The original Community Motivator has left to take another job but continues to serve on the support committee.

*Where we are and the ways ahead*

There is a great deal of overlap between women's and children's issues.

Discrimination is one area. So we have put much emphasis on anti-bias work which looks at strengthening the abilities of children and caregivers to deal with the long-term effects of discrimination. The anti-bias work feeds in through the Community Motivator training programmes and ongoing workshops. But the negative forces are very strong and they persist, and it sometimes seems they are getting worse.

responsiveness, and in the will to work and share more broadly. It's very encouraging to see the light going on like that. You see a person who is neglecting herself or has been neglected suddenly begin to take more care of herself. You see a person who didn't appear to think further than the next meal, start going to meetings, start being interested, start speaking to other people. Those are the small indicators that mean a lot: they are achievements, steps to empowerment.

What we have also seen is that the secret of success is to plan small, realisable steps. If you take on too much and fail, it is much harder to try again – you become demoralised, or people lose their confidence in you. ○

\* In South Africa 'Coloured' refers to South Africans of mixed racial descent; the term 'African' in this article refers to people of African origin.

People do care about their children but tend to put greater value on their ability to clothe, feed and shelter them than anything else. In these areas and under such adverse conditions, the emphasis is on getting work, and rather less on childminding and child stimulation. However, we have found that once a person – traditionally a woman – has recognised the extent of the role she can play in shaping her child's life, there is quite a marked change in demeanour, in



Early Learning Resource Unit (Republic of South Africa)  
Playgroup in Maipai squatter settlement

## About the Bernard van Leer Foundation

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private foundation based in The Netherlands. It operates internationally, concentrating its resources on early childhood development.

The Foundation's income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer (1883-1958), a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist who, in 1919, founded an industrial and consumer packaging company that was to become Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer nv. This is currently a limited company operating in over 40 countries worldwide.

During his lifetime Bernard van Leer supported a broad range of humanitarian causes. In 1949, he created the Bernard van Leer Foundation, to channel the revenues from his fortune to charitable purposes after his death. When he died in 1958, the Foundation became the beneficiary of the entire share capital of the then privately owned Van Leer enterprise and other assets.

Under the leadership of his son Oscar van Leer, who died in 1996, the Foundation focused on enhancing opportunities for children growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage to optimally develop their innate potential.

In seeking to achieve this objective, the Foundation has chosen to concentrate on children from 0-7 years of age. This is because scientific findings have demonstrated that interventions in the early years of childhood are most effective in yielding lasting benefits to children and society.

The Foundation accomplishes its objective through two interconnected strategies:

- 1 an international grant-making programme in selected countries aimed at developing contextually appropriate approaches to early childhood care and development; and
- 2 the sharing of knowledge and know-how in the domain of early childhood development that primarily draws on the experiences generated by the projects that the Foundation supports, with the aim of informing and influencing policy and practice.

A leaflet giving fuller details of the Foundation and its grant-making policy is available, as is a Publications List. Please contact the Department of Documentation and Communication, at the address given inside the front cover.

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Bernard van Leer

Foundation

PO Box 82334, 2508 LH The Hague, The Netherlands. Tel. +31 (0)70 351 2040. Fax +31 (0)70 350 2373 email: [registry@bvleer.nl](mailto:registry@bvleer.nl)

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